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"I DON'T APPROVE OF YOUNG MEN!" SAID NAN, SOLEMNLY.

A POOR LITTLE BARBARIAN.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

ONLY Nan! a mere scotcher of the family, you know!—a needless appendage tacked on at the end, and which—most of them thought—could very well have been dispensed with.

Only Nan! a creature for whom cast-off dresses, discarded hats, and the generally reversion of her superiors' wardrobe seemed quite fitting clothing—a girl who, from her very birth, had been a trial to the family, and seemed likely to continue so indefinitely.

She had no mother—no mother of her own, that is. Certainly there was a stately lady who bore her father's name, wore his wedding-ring, and spent his money.

Lady Alice Ducie was not at all a bad-natured woman.

When she married the handsome master of the Priory she honestly meant to do her best for his children. She made companions of the elder girls, saw that the intermediate ones had a first-rate governess, and generally fulfilled all the duties of a step-mother.

But, since her own father and her five sisters objected to Nan's existence, the Lady Alice, on whom she had not the slightest claim of blood relationship, hardly behaved strangely in following their example.

Poor little Nan! She had heard her own story so often she really began at last to understand a little of the disappointment she had caused, and to regret her bad conduct in presuming to enter the world, which could so very well have dispensed with her.

The Ducies of the Priory were one of the oldest families in Blankshire.

They had probably come to England with the Conqueror—or they thought so. They had

flourished, history said, under the Plantagenets, and altogether thriven exceedingly.

Never had the Priory been threatened with debt or mortgage until the days of Nan's grandfather, who plunged into every species of extravagance, and yet contrived to do nothing that could disgrace his prestige as a gentleman.

He died in the prime of life, urging his only son to wed an heiress.

The son fully intended it, but fate and the charms of a portionless beauty were too strong for him.

He married for love, and spent the first ten years of his life in rigid economy to free the estate from his father's debts.

For ten long years he never saw the Priory. Then he brought his wife and children home in triumph to take their proper place in their own country, and enjoy the loveliest home in Blankshire and the free use of its revenues.

Alas for human hopes! The heir of the Priory died six months after he saw his birthright; and all Mr. Ducie's other children were daughters—

five girls—and an estate strictly entailed on the male line.

It was almost Mr. Ducie's death-blow, and the knowledge of his disappointment tried his wife more than all the years of economy and saving abroad.

Then came a long while of depression, when Mrs. Ducie sometimes fancied her husband would have borne the blow better had she been taken instead of their little son; and at last, when she had grown so fragile and delicate, everyone, except those nearest to her, felt her days were surely numbered.

Once again a hope rose in her heart; once again the nursery, from whence seven-year-old Kitty had recently been promoted, was prepared for use.

Another child was expected at the Priory, and sweet-faced Mrs. Ducie began to think her sorrows were nearly over.

"I shall call him Benjamin," said Mr. Ducie to his wife, a little pompously, "for he will be to us the son of our old age."

Rather exaggerated language, since he was under forty and his wife barely thirty-three, but the master of the Priory was given to be a little stilted in his phraseology.

Mrs. Ducie did not particularly admire the name of Benjamin, and a vague dread would strike her sometimes that the coming baby might be a girl; but she kept both these sentiments to herself.

Her husband seemed utterly to forget that it was possible that he might be called upon to welcome a sixth daughter instead of the looked-for son.

He made grand preparations for the coming of his heir, and so the time passed on.

And at last what happened? The overthrow of all his cherished hopes by the arrival of another little girl.

But Mrs. Ducie had been right in thinking her troubles nearly over. She never even knew her husband's last grief, for before a word could be said to her after the baby's coming she had passed away to the silent land, quitting this weary world just as Nan entered it.

A great many people said this was for the best. Mr. Ducie was just the sort of man to vent his anger on his wife and he could hardly visit his displeasure on an unconscious infant.

The mother's death would certainly endear the child to him, and she would end by becoming his pride and delight.

Wrong!—utterly wrong! Mr. Ducie did visit his disappointment on the baby. He forbade her to be brought near him; he would not allow her to be mentioned in his presence; and the poor little creature might have gone nameless all her days if, in blank despair, after at least a dozen unnoticed appeals to her master, old nurse had not carried the infant down to the village church, and had her christened in her mother's name, which had never been given to any of the elder children.

The vicar, his wife, and nurse were the sponsors, and a plain christening was never seen.

Time passed, but Mr. Ducie's antipathy to his youngest child did not lessen, and, strangely enough, the five girls adopted their father's sentiments.

Marion, the eldest, at thirteen was thoroughly practical. She knew that a baby brother would have ensured them a home at the Priory for one-and-twenty years, and probably a handsome marriage portion.

She knew that little Nan's coming meant, as soon as their father died, the Priory passed from them for ever, and that the cost of feeding, clothing, and educating the child was all so much deducted from her sisters' fortune, and, consequently, Miss Ducie hated poor little Nan pretty cordially, and trained her juniors in her steps.

Mr. Ducie married again before Nan was three years old, an earl's daughter, well dowered, her fortune tied up upon herself, so that she required no provision in case of his death.

Lady Alice was a great contrast to her predecessor. One had given way to her husband in all things; the other held her own with a quiet dignity.

She was not a bad wife. She was a kind

mother to the children (except Nan), she made their interests her own, and sorrowed for them as well as for herself when two little brothers were born only to succumb after a few months—bright, beautiful boys both, and both lost in the same way—convulsions—the first doctor, the cleverest nurse in attendance, so that if it was any consolation to my lady and her husband to know everything possible was done they had it to the full.

There were no more babies at the Priory. Lady Alice took her step-daughters to London, and did her utmost to find them suitable husbands.

No mother ever made more valiant efforts for her own brood than did this lady for her husband's five portionless children.

Marion was twenty-one when the last baby boy died, and after his loss that practical young person resolved to look her position steadily in the face; and, not being noted for delicacy of feeling, she asked Lady Alice point-blank what would become of her and her sisters when their father died.

Lady Alice felt Marion was admirably sensible, and that she need not attempt to mince matters, or in any way soften the blow.

"My husband has insured his life for ten thousand pounds," she replied, frankly, "and that sum comes to you at his death. The interest would make it possible for you to keep up a very quiet home if you all joined together. If you divided the money, and each took her own share, I suppose you would have about eighty pounds a-year."

Marion went away to digest the tidings. Fate did seem cruelly unjust. Either of those baby boys would have ensured her a luxurious home for twenty-one years. They had died, and the little troublesome Nan, whom no one wanted, was the healthiest child in Blankshire, and had never been known to all anything in her life.

The fruit of Marion's deliberation was soon shown; she accepted a young clergyman whom hitherto she had snubbed. Three hundred a-year certain and a pretty rectory home, the prestige of being a married woman, and the chance (which, I fancy, every clergyman's wife dreams of for a brief space) of her husband becoming a bishop—all this was far preferable to continuing Miss Ducie, with a humble annuity of eighty pounds as sole expectation.

Poor Marion! She died within three years, and her husband, who had scruples about the second marriage of the clergy, invited his sister-in-law Jessie to keep house for him and his motherless babies. Thus two of the Misses Ducie were provided for. Lady Alice's utmost efforts could not dispose of any more; and so when this story opens, the twins and Kitty still adorned their father's home, all three, in the opinion of Blankshire, being nothing better than old maids.

Louise and Lillie were twenty-six, Kitty two years younger. Lady Alice often sighed as she looked at them. Her husband was still a handsome man. She had been given to understand her predecessor had been beautiful; but three plainer, more ordinary-looking girls than the three left on her hands it would have been hard to find.

Negatives best described them; they were not clever, not stupid, not disagreeable, not gay, not dull. My lady had no particular fault to find with them. They were dutiful daughters to their father, and honestly fond of him and each other; but she had not a mother's partiality to blind her, and so she admitted to herself frankly there was not a single quality about either of the three likely to inspire a man with intentions matrimonial.

"Girls, I have some news for you!"

It was in the bright August days. Lady Alice and her three encumbrances had enjoyed a month's repose at the Priory after the fatigues of the London season, and were as settled down in their country home as though they had never left it.

My lady had been shut up full an hour with her husband in the library, and, therefore, the girls guessed the news was of some importance. They all looked up eagerly, and Kitty, who was the quickest of the three, exclaimed,—

"What is it? Oh! mamma, do tell me. Have you an invitation for us?"

"Yes and no," said Lady Alice, laughing. "I have an invitation, but whether it is one you can accept I hardly know."

Three pairs of eyes were fixed on her in eager anticipation.

"I hope it is for us all!" said Lillie, good-temperedly. "People are beginning to get so mean now they often send their invitations pointedly for 'two Misses Ducie.'"

"It is for only one," said her step-mother, quietly.

"Only one!—which?"

"I have no idea."

The girls stared at her. But that their stately step-mother was not given to such pastimes they would have said she was hoaxing them.

"Mamma, do tell us!"

Lady Alice asked nothing better. She drew a chair in their midst, and sat down. She was really attached to these girls, plain as they were. They could hardly remember their own mother, and loved her better than anyone else, except each other. She was very glad of the news she brought them, and yet she felt a little doubtful about the telling of it.

"I expect you have all heard of Colonel Vernon?"

The three faces looked their interest.

Had not the name of Hugh Vernon been instilled in their minds from childhood as that of a man who would some day do them a cruel wrong?

Ever since the last of Lady Alice's babies had died—nine years ago—the whole world of Blankshire had known that some day or other Hugh Vernon, then a hard-working soldier in an Indian regiment, would some day be master of the Priory and its revenues.

"Of course we have," said Kitty, who was a more rapid thinker than either of the twins, and had grasped the position before it had dawned on them. "He is father's heir-at-law."

Lady Alice sighed.

"Just so. The moment anything happens to your father he will be master here."

"It's abominable!" said Kitty. "I wonder he had the impertinence to write to you."

"He wrote to your father."

"Well, it's just the same."

"I can't understand it," said Louise, helplessly.

"If none of us can have the Priory because we are girls, however did Colonel Vernon's mother leave her claim to him?"

"His mother had nothing to do with it," explained Lady Alice. "His claim comes from his father, who was your grandfather's nephew."

The girls looked puzzled.

"Then, if his grandfather and ours were brothers, why is he called Vernon?"

"Because his grandfather took the name on marrying an heiress."

"I suppose he is very rich!"

"He is now. Fortune seems to have been lavish with him. Relations on his mother's side have been good to him, and left him legacies. He has sold out of the army, and means to spend the rest of his life in England."

"And the invitation?"

Lady Alice felt considerable embarrassment.

"He must be very eccentric. He writes to your father that he shall never marry, and his brother will certainly be his heir. He proposes that his brother should come to the Priory on a long visit."

Not a shadow of her meaning came to the three girls. They were not good at taking hints.

"But the invitation?" persisted Kitty.

"I am coming to that. Percy Vernon will need a wife, and the Colonel thinks it would be some slight atonement for the misfortune your father has suffered through having no son if one of his daughters became the future mistress of the Priory."

The three pairs of eyes stared. This was wonderful, exciting, amazing.

"Colonel Vernon writes he cannot, of course, control his brother's tastes or those of his kinswomen, but Percy being perfectly free and hearty, whole, and anxious to choose a bride, he thinks



his project has every chance of success. On the wedding-day the Colonel will resign all claim to the beahship of the Priory in favour of his brother.

Kitty clapped her hands.

"He must be rather nice, after all!"

"I believe he is a general favourite. People have often wondered why he never married. Your father has answered his letter, saying that we shall be delighted to see Mr. Vernon as soon as he can make it convenient to arrive. I have just sent out invitations for the shooting on the first. We shall have a houseful, and, as there is only a fortnight for preparations, we had better drive into Brarley this afternoon, and order whatever you want. I wish you to look nice, but don't be too extravagant, girls."

She was turning to leave the room when there came a knock at the door, such a trembling, timid tap, almost as though the person who gave it felt afraid of being an unwelcome intruder.

"Come in!" said Lady Alice, sharply.

The apartment had originally been her own boudoir, and as the girls grew up she let them use it as a general morning-room, retreating to her dressing-room when not disposed for their company.

"It's only Nan, I dare say," said Kitty, contemptuously. "What can she want?"

Then entered the youngest child of the house, who in most families would have been the pet, and darling. This girl was neither; all the kindness she had ever known had come from old nurse and strangers.

Lady Alice was never positively harsh to her; she simply neglected her. At nurse's death she engaged a venerable, old-fashioned governess, who undertook the whole care of the family burden for thirty pounds a year.

Nan and Miss Blake had a suite of rooms to themselves, and never joined the downstairs party even at meals; but for seeing them in church Lady Alice really might have managed to forget their very existence.

Nan entered, slowly, as one conscious of being unwelcome. She was now seventeen, and half a head taller than Kitty. She was kept in short petticoats and childish costumes, because it being a public fact that there were seven years between her and Kitty it was necessary to make her as juvenile as possible in her sister's interests.

There is beauty which is independent of its surroundings, which flashes on you at once in spite of toilet mistakes; but Nan had no beauty of this order. She looked a neglected girl, whose arms and legs had grown too rapidly for her clothes, and whose figure, slim and graceful as it was, was disguised and spoiled by the very dirty cotton dress, which would have suited a child of twelve, so that all Nan's friends could say for her was that she had a nice sad face, and if only she were dressed decently, she would be no worse looking than her sisters.

Poor little Nan!

She possessed an artistic soul, and would have revelled in pretty things; the hideous chocolate print was positive pain to her, and the fact that its full skirt did not nearly reach to her ankles seemed an offence against her modesty. She wore white stockings and clumsy country shoes.

There was nothing in her attire suggestive of her position, and yet, forlorn, neglected little creature as she was, you felt instinctively she was a lady. Perhaps the soft silkiness of her hair, the snowiness of her linen collar brought home this consciousness to the beholder, and assured them that Nan's appearance was not due to slovenliness or untidiness.

"What do you want here?"

"Tiresome girl, go back to Miss Blake!"

"Nan, you know you have no business here!"

So much for the three sisters.

The step-mother took a different tone. Eyeing the poor child from head to foot, she asked, frigidly,—

"Do you think yourself fit for your sisters' society?"

Nan's chocolate print, besides its faults of shape and size, had suffred heavily in the wash; the colour had run in many places, and the result was odd. Taken as she stood, Mr. Ducie's

youngest child did not display a single garment which the scullery-maid would have accepted as a gift.

"I know," said Nan, humbly, feeling herself as inferior to her sisters as was the poor chocolate print to their French materials. "That is what I came to ask you, mamma. Can I have a new dress?"

"I gave Miss Blake some things to alter for you the other day."

"She says she can't make anything of them; they are too small."

"Nonsense!"

"Go, away," said Kitty, "and don't bother."

But for once Nan stood her ground.

"Mamma," she said, entreatingly, "do let me have a new dress, just for once; I never have had anything bought on purpose for me, I think, in my whole life."

Lady Alice felt touched.

"What do you want, Nan?"

She was quite prepared to hear a "silk dress," or "a dress like Kitty's;" but Nan was far too meek to aspire to such grandeur.

"I should like a grey dress for Sundays," she said, gravely, "and a white straw hat."

"I don't think that is unreasonable, Nan," said the step-mother in a tender tone; "but you must be very careful. I have to buy so many things for your sisters, I can't afford much, but here are three sovereigns; you and Miss Blake can go into Brarley to-morrow and choose the dress. You must not be extravagant; the three pounds can pay for all—making, hat, and everything."

Nan would have liked to kiss her step-mother on the spot, but experience had taught her her caresses were unwelcome, so she only said "thank you, mamma," and retired.

"Poor little thing!" said Lady Alice, half sadly. "We are all forgetting Nan is growing up."

"She can't grow much more," said Kitty, flippantly; "or she'll be like a maypole."

"I think after next season I shall send away Miss Blake."

"Mamma!"

"It will be useless to keep her; she is getting on in years, and must have taught Nan all she knows. She has treated us very well to look after the child and keep her out of mischief, but I shall certainly get rid of her soon."

If only anyone had been able to tell her ladyship the truth she would have sent Miss Blake away that very day.

The governess had been a brilliant instructress once, and had filled good positions, but long before she came to the Priory she had contracted a fatal habit, and the utter freedom from supervision she enjoyed at Mr. Ducie's had festered it.

She was not an habitual drunkard, but she took a great deal more than she should have done, and in pretty nearly every week there was at least one day when she kept her room with a "bad headache."

Nan, in her innocence, suspected nothing, and really sympathised very much with Miss Blake's illness.

She did not love her governess as she had loved old nurse, or as she loved Mrs. Austin, the Rector's wife, who had come to the village when Nan was ten years old, and been the truest friend ever seen; but she got on very well with Miss Blake, and picked up a very fair education from her in spite of her old-fashioned ways and little weakness.

Nan had an unquenchable thirst for information; she asked questions on every subject, ransacked the library for books, and so got a great deal of learning into her childish head.

She took care of the governess instead of the latter taking care of her. She never dreamed Miss Blake was not an admirable instructress, only she was always being tired and having headaches, whereas Nan never suffered from either affliction; therefore it seemed almost natural their positions should be reversed, and the pupil become the guide, and the governess the guided.

This was not the day for one of Miss Blake's headaches, and Nan found her toiling over an old dress of Kitty's, which it had just dawned on

her might do for Nan if plentifully trimmed with lace from another of the same sister's.

"It's my belief," said the governess, who hated all the Misses Ducie except her pupil, "they never meant to have left that lace on. It's nine inches deep, and now I've washed it it looks as good as new. It will be the prettiest dress you've ever had!"

Nan sat down at Miss Blake's feet, exhibited the three sovereigns and told the news.

"We won't go to Brarley to-day, because I want to finish this," said the governess; "we'll start directly after breakfast to-morrow."

But to-morrow she could hardly turn her head on the pillow. There must have been some good in the woman despite her sin, for she sent a pencilled note to Nan, telling her to go and beg Mrs. Austin to take her into Brarley, and on no account to wait for herself.

The Rector's wife was the prettiest, blithest little matron of thirty. The living was a poor one, or Mr. Ducie would have given it to his son-in-law, but the Austins had private means. They kept two servants, besides a nurse and a boy to attend to the pony and wait at table.

"How fortunate!" said Mrs. Austin, kindly. "I was just going into Brarley, and I will help you do your shopping with pleasure. What! Miss Blake ill again!" (she had her own suspicions as to the illness!) "Then you must come home with me and the Rector shall see you back before dark."

"How lovely!"

Florence Austin sighed as she kissed Nan. A very warm-hearted, impetuous little woman, her husband often told her she would have liked to stand on an inverted butt in the market-place of Brarley and address the townsfolk, the wrongs of Nan Ducie being her theme.

They did their shopping, and if the Rector's wife added something from her own purse to the magical three sovereigns so that they performed results never before accomplished, who shall blame her?

True Mr. Ducie counted his income by thousands, but if he wouldn't spend his money on Nan someone must see the poor child had a little pleasure—at least that was Mrs. Austin's apology to herself.

Nan suspected nothing. She and Miss Blake were so used to performing marvels with old clothes that her friend's genius for doing miracles with three pounds seemed to her quite natural.

The grey dress material was bought first.

"I'll make that," said Mrs. Austin, coolly. "You and Miss Blake can do the rest."

To Nan's bewilderment two cambrics were added to the stock, a white straw hat with trimmings, some pretty gloves, and last a ready-made black costume.

"I feel quite grown up," said Nan, when they drove home. "Fancy, four new dresses all at once, and I never had one before!"

Florence suggested the black should be tried on at once.

Mrs. Austin herself assisted her to dress, and when all was completed Nan surveyed herself like a creature in a dream.

"Is it really me?"

She saw reflected in the mirror a slight, graceful girl, whose creamy skin, the sombre dress set off to perfection; the skirt just cleared the ground, the body adapted itself to the slender form, the sleeves were a proper size; altogether Nan felt very much as though she had been transformed into someone else, and she went down to the study at Florence's request to show herself to the Rector in a most cheerful mood.

But the Rector was not there; he had been called to a sick parishioner, leaving a recently arrived guest to entertain himself as best he could.

Nan started.

That was natural enough, since never before had she found herself face to face with a stranger, but that the gentleman, who looked—Nan thought—quite middle-aged, should start too was singular.

He was tall and sunburnt, his hair a little thin, and with a few silver threads among the jet; a

face not free from sadness, but one which inspired trust.

Poor Nan, blushing crimson, tried hard to find something to say, and failed ignominiously.

"Were you looking for Mr. Austin? He has just gone out."

"Yes."

Really his voice was nice and kind.

Nan grew bolder.

"I thought I should find him here. Mrs. Austin said so."

"Florence! Is she at home?"

"Oh, yes. She will be down directly. Do you know her?"

"I have known her thirty years, young lady," was the reply.

"Thirty years! But surely you don't mean it. Mrs. Austin can't be more than thirty."

"She was thirty last week. I have known her ever since she was born. I happen to be her uncle."

"Oh!"

"But," raising his voice, mischievously, for he caught the sound of the soft *frou frou* of a woman's dress, and felt pretty sure his hostess was near enough to hear, "she is a most disobedient and disrespectful niece. She always perals in calling me Rex, which you know is not the way to treat an uncle; and when I wanted her to keep house for me nine years ago she flatly refused, saying she'd a great deal rather marry Karl Austin."

Nan was laughing then, as he had meant she should, and Florence was clinging with both arms round his neck as though she could not welcome him enough.

"Oh, Rex, I am so glad to have you!"

"And I to come."

Nan quietly crept out of the room. She had a kind of instinctive delicacy which taught her Mrs. Austin and her uncle might have something private to converse about after years of separation, so she wandered into the garden and stood looking over the hawthorn hedge watching for the Rector's return.

"Oh, Rex!" exclaimed Mrs. Austin, "you never meant that horrid letter?"

"I meant every word of it, Floy."

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" cried the little lady. "Karl and I both think so!"

"I am much obliged to you."

"It's madness!"

"Hardly. It is only anticipating events by a few years."

"You speak as if you were ninety. Do you know you are younger than my Karl?"

"In years, perhaps; much older in all else."

"Then you mean to persist in your folly! What in the world has brought you to Blackshire!"

"A desire to see a certain wilful little niece, and—"

"And?" she repeated, encouragingly.

"Well, I'll own it, Floy. I want to watch the course of events at the Priory. I'm going to ask you to give me house room while Mr. Vernon does his wooing."

"Poor fellow!"

"Meaning me?"

"Oh, no; meaning Mr. Vernon."

"And why?"

"The Misses Duce are horrible!"

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Floy!"

"Well, there's nothing in them, and they are so cruel to Nan."

"Who is the name of all that's wonderful is Nan?"

"A dear little friend of mine."

"Then what has she to do with the Duces?"

"She's their sister, unfortunately."

"Their sister!"

"The baby who cost Mr. Duce his first wife's life. They've all hated her ever since."

"And I suppose she is grown up by this time?"

"She's a perfect baby in everything but size," Her uncle looked alarmed.

"My dear girl, do you mean she is an idiot or deficient?"

"You can judge for yourself."

"How! I have no idea of going to the Priory, let me tell you."

"You wouldn't see Nan if you did. She is kept shut up with an old governess who isn't fit to come near her."

"But you said I could judge for myself."

"Nan is spending the day with me. It was she I found talking to you when I came down."

"That!"

"Even that."

"But you said she was a baby."

"And you said she was deficient! She is seventeen, and I don't think she has ever been inside any house but the Priory and this. No one speaks a kind word to her from year's end to year's end, and she is as utterly neglected as though she were a workhouse orphan."

Nan and the Rector came in just then, and the youngest Miss Duce was presented formally to Uncle Rex, otherwise Colonel Reginald Hughes.

Nan looked at him timidly with her big blue eyes, and wondered if things would have been pleasant for her if she, too, had had an uncle.

They drank tea in the pleasant garden under the shade of the large mulberry-tree, and Nan, in all the glory of her new dress, felt quite a different creature from the lonely child who partook of thick bread-and-butter under Miss Blake's auspices in the dreary schoolroom at home.

It was past eight when she came downstairs, a large parcel in her hand, containing the venerable chocolate print, also a shawl of Mrs. Austin's folded round her shoulders.

"I am going to see you home, Miss Duce," said Uncle Rex, promptly, taking up his hat.

"I shall leave my venerable nephew safely at home. It's not every man who can trust an uncle younger than himself."

The Rector smiled.

"Will you go with Uncle Rex, Nan?"

The girl looked into the soldier's face. He felt a thrill of strange emotion go through his whole frame at that innocent scrutiny. Perhaps all three of the listeners waited anxiously for Nan's reply.

"Yes," says the girl, simply. "If he does not mind taking care of me."

They passed through the gate together, out into the village lane.

The air was sweet with the scent of honey-suckle, the wild roses bloomed in the hedge.

"Are you very fond of the Priory, Miss Duce?" asked the soldier after a long, long pause.

"Very; and yet I don't know why. I often think I should like to go away and never see it again."

"It used to be very beautiful."

"Have you ever seen it?"

"My father took me there once as a lad; it is years ago. I fancy your parents were abroad."

"Yes; nurse told me mamma lived in foreign countries the first ten years she was married."

"Your mother has been dead a long time, I think I have heard?"

"She died when I was born."

"You are very like her."

"I!" Nan started. "Colonel Hughes, do you mean it? Did you really know mamma?"

"I met her in London. I was a mere boy at the time. I remember thinking her very sad. It was not long after your brother's death."

Nan sighed.

"Then, as you have heard all about it," she said, quaintly, "you can understand how disappointed they all were when I came."

"I know your father wished for an heir. Do you know your cousin, Colonel Vernon, who is his next-of-kin?"

"I have heard of him, when I was quite a little girl. I used to think of him a great deal. It was very foolish."

"It was kind. And what did you think, Miss Nan?"

"I used to wish that he lived in England, so that I could see him."

The soldier's eyes were bent on her keenly. Her words surprised him. Why should she wish to see the man her whole family regarded as their foe?

"You see," said Nan, when he told her his

astonishment, "if he had only been in England, I used to think, then I could have gone to him. Of course I know now it was foolish; but when I was a child I used to think if only Colonel Vernon knew how much the girls loved the Priory he would give it to one of them. I meant to go and throw myself at his feet and beg him to. There was a girl in some book who found out when the Emperor of Russia would pass, and she threw herself at his feet, and he gave her her father's pardon. Well, I used to think Colonel Vernon would give me the Priory for my sisters."

"Then you did not want it for yourself?"

"Oh, no! I think if ever I could get it for them they would forgive me."

"But they have nothing to forgive."

Nan shook her little head sorrowfully.

"It is no use thinking about it. I know such things don't happen nowadays."

"How many sisters have you?"

"Four. The eldest is dead."

"And none of them married?"

Nan shook her head again.

"No. Jessie keeps house for Mr. Gray; he was Marion's husband, you know. The other three are at home."

"They must be pleasant companions for you. I think a lot of sisters make a house merry."

Nan opened her eyes.

"I never see them."

"My dear child!"

"I used to see them in church," said Nan, quaintly; "but Miss Blake is getting old, and the gallery makes her feel dizzy, so she and I sit in the free seats near the door, and we can't see papa's pew from there."

He felt his blood boil as he listened. He remembered this girl's mother. Her face had struck him, busy as he was then, with strong admiration; he could recall it even now.

What would she say if she could know the scant kindness meted out to the child who cost her her life, and had spoken so unconsciously—was evidently far from thinking the treatment shown her was unreasonable, considering her offence—that his heart almost ached as he looked at her, the red gleams of the setting sun falling on her hair, and turning it to rays of gold, and her delicate face lit up with a new eagerness.

"I should like us to be friends," said the Colonel, kindly. "We are both very much alone in the world, it seems."

"You are not," said Nan, quickly; "you have got Mr. and Mrs. Austin."

"And I love them dearly, but they are wrapped up in each other and their babies. They have not much affection left to bestow upon an old soldier."

"You are not old," said Nan, simply. "You said just now you were younger than the Rector."

"I am double your age, I fancy. Well, Miss Nan, is it a bargain? Will you be my friend?"

Nan put her little ungloved hand into his, and answered, gravely,—

"Yes."

She had no idea, poor child, she was doing anything unusual, or that the strictest parson could have condemned. That young ladies do not generally promise friendship to strange soldiers just introduced to them never once occurred to her mind, nor did it strike her that, though she had walked from the Priory gates to the Rectory in ten minutes that very morning, the same journey now took her nearly an hour.

"I shall be staying at the Rectory some time," said the Colonel, presently, "so we shall meet often. Florence tells me you are a great favourite of hers."

"She is very kind to me."

"She is a good-hearted girl enough."

"She is perfect!" said Nan, enthusiastically.

"When I want to think of anything lovely I just shut my eyes, and see Mrs. Austin as she looks on Sunday."

"Has she a different look on Sunday?"

"I think so. She sits alone in the Rectory-pew with her little boy, and the way she looks at him, and finds his places—I don't know how to say it—but it always makes me want to cry. It makes me want my mother so."

"Poor little girl!"

They were at the lodge gates now, and the Colonel said "good-night." He knew that his further escort would only embarrass Nan.

Florence remarked on his lengthy absence; but he told her he had been smoking a cigar.

"What do you think of her?"

"I should like to do something desperate to her sisters."

Florence looked delighted.

"I am so glad you like her! Rex, I have a lovely scheme."

The Rector interposed.

"I warn you never to listen to any suggestion introduced like that. A scheme with Florence always means one thing—match-making, as I know by experience."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Austin. "Let me tell him. I was awfully angry when you told me of your folly at first, Rex, but now I am quite delighted, and think it charming."

"I don't understand."

"The best thing in the world for Nan, if only he is good enough for her, which I almost doubt."

"Karl," said the Colonel, pleasantly. "Do ask your wife not to talk in riddles!"

Karl removed his pipe to explain.

"Florence means that if Mr. Vernon really comes wooing to the Priory he will marry her."

"Marry Nan!"

"Well, he's to have his pick of the girls, and having an eye for beauty, he won't think much of the three elder ones; I don't suppose he will be introduced to Nan, but he might meet her by accident and fall in love."

"It is preposterous!"

"Falling in love! I quite agree with you, sir. Still people do it sometimes."

"I don't mean that."

"What then?"

"To think of that child as Percy Vernon's wife. The idea is absurd!"

"Why?"

"There are more than thirteen years between them to begin with."

"That's nothing when the disparity is on the right side."

"Then you know his character?"

"Well, Karl and I have thought him a reprobate for many a year," said Mrs. Austin, gravely, "but you always seemed to believe in him."

A true charge.

"Besides," put in the Rector, "you said he had reformed entirely, and only needed to marry and settle down to make quite a valuable member of society."

Colonel Hughes could have shaken both husband and wife, though they were great favourites with him. To have his own words turned against him in this fashion was intolerable; besides, the charge was true.

For five years past he had defended Percy Vernon against all blame—had declared he only needed a "start" to get on, and that the injustice of fate in giving him fewer hundreds than his brother had thousands alone was to blame for his being a little wild.

Colonel Hughes declared again and again Hugh Vernon must pay Percy's debts, and give him the reversion of the Priory in the future, and a fixed income in the present, on condition of the prodigal marrying and settling down. He asserted that Mr. Vernon would then turn over a new leaf, and prove an exemplary husband.

Most likely he gained Hugh Vernon's ear, and submitted his opinion to him. The elder brother's letter to Mr. Ducie looked suspiciously like it, and Colonel Hughes had come to Blankshire prepared to superintend Percy's wooing and dance at his wedding.

And now his sentiments were all changed. A few hours in the August gloaming, the sight of a girl's face, and the Colonel's opinions were altered.

He still believed Percy Vernon's salvation depended on matrimony, but it seemed to him deprecation should he enter the holy estate in company with an innocent child like Nan.

There were passages in Percy's life which rose up before Colonel Hughes' mind, and made him

shudder at the thoughts they might ever reach Nan's ears; decidedly it was best for the prodigal to marry; only, for his own sake, Heaven grant that, of the four daughters of the Priory, he did not select as his life's partner little Nan!

CHAPTER II.

THERE was quite a pleasant stir and excitement in the Ducie family now Mr. Vernon was expected.

Since poor Marion's courtship, almost nine years ago, there had been no love-making at the Priory.

Lady Alice began to think it would be very pleasant to superintend an engaged pair, even if their attachment was of a somewhat prosaic character; and as to the other sisters, they were on the tips of expectation.

Colonel Vernon's letter seemed to intimate his brotherly authority had been exerted to advise Percy to choose a wife from among his kinswomen; therefore the three girls felt morally certain that one of them would shortly be a bride and the other two figure as her bridesmaids.

"He can't marry us all," said Kitty, who possessed the habit of speaking her mind plainly to an almost painful degree; "so I vote we make up our minds beforehand not to be jealous, but to rejoice in each other's good fortune. Anyway, a wedding in the family will be great fun, and I mean to enjoy it whether I win the prize or one of you."

The twins admitted the sense of this, and it was solemnly agreed that as soon as Mr. Vernon had made his choice the two young ladies who were rejected should bury any disappointment they might feel, and think only of their sister's success.

"I hope it will be me," said Kitty, frankly. "You see, mamma says she must bring Nan out next year, and I shan't care to be known as having a grown-up sister seven years younger than myself."

"Nan is a nuisance!" said Lettie. "She never can keep out of the way; and now mamma has given her that money she has come out like a woman of twenty."

There was a little—very little—more justice in Kitty's disposition.

"Well, I thought the child had worked wonders. I'm sure I never made ten pounds go as far as her three; and really she is not bad-looking. I met her just now going down to the Rectory in her longed-for grey dress and white hat, and I hardly knew her."

"If you are going over to Nan's side there is no knowing what we are to expect next."

"I am not; only to-day"—Kitty lowered her voice and tried not to show she was touched—"when I met her in her grey frock it came into my head she was more like the dim remembrance I have of our mother than any of us."

No expense had been spared, no trouble grudged; and so the three Miss Ducies appeared to their best advantage when, five minutes before the dinner-hour, their cousin entered the drawing-room.

As it was impossible to take her three step-daughters to the station, and she would not give either an unfair advantage, Lady Alice had driven over to meet Mr. Vernon alone, and so this was his first introduction to his cousins.

The girls were delighted. There are some men who seem made to steal women's hearts; who, whatever their faults, however palpable their weakness, yet always find defenders among the softer sex.

I don't mean this type of man is always bad and heartless, though certainly it is usually wanting in truth and bravery.

Percy Vernon was thirty. He looked as if he had moved in the best society all his life and been a favourite with it, for his whole air and bearing betokened a man thoroughly at ease as to the impression he might make.

His hair was bright, wavy brown, his eyes light blue, his features clearly cut and regular, his teeth white and even.

A keen judge of character would have agreed that the mouth was weak and the expression cruel; but a long, silky moustache hid this from casual observers, and few challenged the general opinion that Percy Vernon was one of the handsomest men of the day.

He talked fluently on any subject which arose, his voice insensibly lowering itself and taking a tender key when he spoke to a woman.

Some people called him a flirt. I think myself his caressing way of speaking to the opposite sex had grown so much a habit that he was unconscious of it.

He could no more help looking into a woman's eyes, holding her hand a trifle longer than was necessary, and listening to her words as though his life hung upon them.

He could no more help these little ways than he could the startling fact that he had never, since he came of age, known what it was to be out of debt.

"You are not in the army, like your brother," said Lady Alice, presently, in the course of dinner. "What is your profession, Mr. Vernon?"

"Literature," was the prompt reply. "I am a poet—as yet unknown to fame; but I hope to make my mark before long."

He had been saying this for nine years. It was perfectly true he was as yet unknown to fame, but then it was extremely probable he would remain so.

He had a wonderful facility for writing verses, but they were not the style of verses which live.

He was so well aware of this that he never attempted to get them published.

He threw off a few lines impromptu at a picnic to please his hostess; he addressed sonnets to young ladies on their birthdays; and he had once written an acrostic.

But the Ducies received his statement with profound awe.

A poet for a future connection was, indeed, an honour; and the fact that few poets make a fortune did not trouble them in the least, since Colonel Vernon had stated in writing his intention of allowing the young couple four thousand a-year until such time as they came into possession of the Priory.

The young couple! Mr. Ducie and Lady Alice never doubted one of their girls would be chosen, but as the days wore on they became seriously perplexed as for which of the three was reserved the honour of being Mrs. Percy Vernon.

The poet was strictly impartial. He sang duets with one cousin, went riding with another, and offered to give the third dancing lessons.

Mr. Vernon had been a fortnight at the Priory, and was getting as much perplexed as his hosts were for him.

He really meant to marry. His hopes of a fortune from his brother depended on it, and as that brother had commanded him to select a Miss Ducie as his wife he was really anxious to accommodate him, but which to choose baffled him.

It was not that he liked them so much, or that they were all distasteful to him. For either of the three he could have mustered a certain amount of cool regard, which he considered quite enough affection with which to enter the married state.

He had been a fortnight at the Priory, and was as far from a decision as ever, but he began to perceive that Mr. Ducie and his wife thought his procrastination odd; so pleading a bad headache as an excuse for not accompanying the family to a garden-party—the last of the season—he stayed at home, resolved before they returned to have answered the problem which troubled him.

It was a lovely day, and Percy Vernon strolled idly in the grounds enjoying their beauty, and thinking of the changes he would make when he was master.

He had wandered a long distance from the house, and had well-nigh lost his way in the mazes of the wood when a girl's voice broke on him sweet and clear, not trained and tutored to shakes and turns—just a sweet, melodious song, like that of a bird.

He listened in admiration to the old, old story of love and sorrow, which has never sounded more touching than in the ballad "Auld Robin Gray."

Then, as the last note died away, he pushed aside the brambles which divided them, and stood face to face with the songstress.

He started. He had seen many lovely women, had known many a professional beauty, but no face had ever touched him as this girl's did now.

She was neither child nor woman, but a charming mixture of both. Involuntarily as he looked at her he thought of Longfellow's lines:—

"Standing with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood meet."

She wore a plain, untrimmed dress, but it fitted her slim, girlish figure to a nicety, and the colour just matched her eyes; her hair of real golden brown had escaped its coils, and hung in bright waves over her shoulder. Her hat lay idly at her feet, and she was playing with some wild flowers she had evidently just gathered.

At the sight of Percy she started, blushed crimson, and then said, pleadingly,—

"Oh, please do not tell anyone you met me; indeed I thought you were in your own room with a bad headache, or I would never have come!"

"Do not fear that I shall betray you," said Percy, gently; "I could not. But why should anyone object to your being here? Lady Alice told me yesterday the whole village were allowed in the Priory woods."

"Yes."

"So, even if you are not a friend of the Ducies, what harm would there be in your walking here?"

"Oh, I almost live here generally; the woods are my delight."

"Then why are you so afraid of anyone knowing you are here this afternoon?"

"It is different now."

"And why?"

"Mamma said I was never to walk anywhere where there was a chance of my meeting you."

Vernon bit his lip. There were a few dark pages in his past, but he had believed them secret. That one of the matrons of this little country-place should deem a simple meeting with him could harm her child was hardly welcome tidings.

"I am sorry your mother has so bad an opinion of me. Really—"

But the girl interrupted him with a laugh.

"Bad opinion of you! Why, mamma thinks you perfect! I heard her say the other day you were the most fascinating man she ever met."

"Then why is she so anxious to guard you from me?"

"Don't you know? Have you really been here so long and not heard? I am never allowed to see strangers. You see I am not like the others. I haven't been educated and taken in society, or taught how to behave. They are all ashamed of me, and I just run wild. You need not look sorry. I am not unhappy, and some day when the girls are married it will be different perhaps."

It was the greatest surprise Percy Vernon had ever known; even now he could not realize it.

"You cannot mean you are one of Mr. Ducie's daughters?"

"Yes."

"And sister to Kitty and the twins?"

"Yes," said the girl again; then after a pause she said, in a strange, sweet tone, "of course I know I am not a bit like them."

"Not a scrap!"

"But I don't think it's kind of you to be so surprised that I am their sister."

"I never was so amazed!"

"It's cruel!" and now he felt there was a kind of sob in her voice. "I know I'm not elegant or clever, or anything like the girls, but I think you need not tell me I'm so horrid you can't quite believe I am their sister."

Percy looked at her eagerly, but there was no suspicion of coquetry in the blue eyes.

"I never thought you horrid!"

"You seemed to."

"You are very different to your sisters, but there are different kinds of charms. What can be a greater contrast than the violet and the poppy! But I don't think people call the violet horrid."

Nan wiped away a tear.

"You won't tell mamma!"

"No, indeed."

"You see," said the girl, quaintly, "I have been so used to ramble about, I don't like being shut up in my dull, old schoolroom, and Miss Blake is ill to-day, so thinking you were safe indoors with a headache I came out."

"But why should you be afraid to meet me?"

"I am not afraid."

"Well, why should Lady Alice object?"

"You see," said Nan, wistfully, "they are ashamed of me."

"What a cruel thing!"

"I am just a little savage! Kitty says that I can't behave properly, and so when anyone comes I always have to keep out of the way."

"And don't you see anyone?"

"I go to the Rectory pretty often. Mrs. Austin is very kind to me. They have all gone to the garden-party, or I daresay I should be there this afternoon."

"What is your name?"

"I was christened Anna, but no one ever call me anything but Nan."

"May I say Nan?"

"I suppose so. If you marry Kitty you will be a sort of a brother."

"I shall never marry Kitty, Nan."

Nan opened her eyes.

"I hoped you would."

"Why?"

He was not best pleased at the statement.

"She is always kinder to me than the twins. I think if Kitty were married she would have me to stay with her sometimes. You see I have never been away from the Priory even for a night, and sometimes I get a kind of longing to see the world beyond our village."

Mr. Vernon decided it would be a very pleasing task to show this pretty child a little of life and its pleasures; it would be almost like a second youth to watch her naïve delight at all the marvels of art and nature.

"How if you were married yourself?" he suggested. "You would see the world then."

Nan shook her head with great determination.

"That wouldn't do at all."

"Why not?"

"I never mean to marry anyone."

"What has given you such a remarkable aversion to matrimony?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps you have been troubled with distasteful attentions?"

He had to put this suggestion into far plainer language before he reached Nan's comprehension; then she smiled as though it were an absurdity.

"I never spoke to a young man in my whole life," she said, gravely. "I don't approve of them."

Mr. Vernon laughed; he really could not help it.

"If you have never spoken to any, isn't it rather unfair to condemn the whole race so unfeelingly?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"They do so much harm."

"However can you know?"

"I have read a good many books."

"But all the young men in books aren't bad, surely?"

"No, but they always cause the troubles. Stories begin so nicely, and everything goes on as well as possible until a young man comes in."

"And then?"

"He falls in love with the heroine, and troubles begin to come."

"Nan, you are quite a philosopher."

"Am I?"

"And so that is why you have made up your mind never to be married?"

"Not quite."

"What other objection have you?"

"Married people are always miserable."

"Your experience seems to have been unfortunate. I should have thought your father and Lady Alice a model couple, and I have always heard of your friends, the Austins, as devoted to each other."

"I don't know about Lady Alice; second wives don't count. My own mother broke her heart, and Mrs. Austin looks as if she were going to cry whenever the Rectory coughs. Her whole life is just one dread of his being ill."

A clock chimed six; clearly it was time for Mr. Vernon to return to the Priory.

Nan refused to accompany him.

"I can go in the back way. I had rather not be seen walking with you, Mr. Vernon."

"But I mean to be friends with you. I shall tell Lady Alice I want to see more of my little cousin."

"Oh, don't!"

"Why not. Do you hate me quite, Nan?"

"Oh, no, but if you tell mamma that, she must guess you have seen me."

This was unanswerable. Mr. Vernon, for the first time in his life, felt baffled.

"But what am I to do?"

"Give it up."

"No. Nan, where do you take tea?"

"In the school-room with Miss Blake."

"Then I shall appear there to-night and beg Miss Blake to spare me a cup. We must meet as strangers; then if I have been introduced to you in your own dominions, Lady Alice can't ascribe our meeting to your fault."

Mr. Vernon carried out his plan to the letter. He told the footman he thought a cup of tea would be good for his head; if tea was going on in the schoolroom he could go there in search of it.

The man stared, but Percy had given him one or two handsome tips, and so he was not prepared to dispute his wishes, and led the way to Miss Blake's dominions with seeming innocence.

But, as ill luck would have it, Miss Blake was in no state to receive visitors. She just managed to see her pupil and warn her of the coming "headache."

Nan, the most innocent and unsuspecting of girls, tried to keep her until her cousin should appear; the consequence was that the falling of Mr. Ducie's glasses, which none of the family had ever suspected, was soon recalled to the young man.

"You had better leave us, madam," was Vernon's advice to the splutter. "I will take care that the true nature of your indisposition reaches Mr. Ducie's ear to-night."

"Why were you so unkind to her?" asked Nan, when she and her cousin were sitting at tea as naturally as though it was her habit to dispense refreshments to young men every afternoon. "Poor old thing, she can't help being ill."

"Is she like this often?" asked Percy, carefully evading the question.

"She has had these headaches ever since she came to us, only they have come much oftener lately; she is generally in bed one day every week."

"And doesn't your mamma know?"

"She knows she is not strong. Poor Miss Blake, she is as kind to me as ever she can be. It would be a shame to send her away just because she has bad health."

"What a tender little heart you have, child!"

"I don't think so," said Nan; "but I have one virtue—I am very staunch. If I like a person once I like them always."

"I wish you would like me always, little Nan. Will you try?"

The sound of wheels returning prevented Nan from having to answer this question.

"Remember," said Percy, "I take the whole explanation of things on myself. You have only to leave it to me."

Lady Alice was certainly surprised when Mr. Vernon followed her upstairs (after greeting her in the hall and assuring her his headache had departed) and requested a moment's private conversation.

"He must have made up his mind," she decided quickly to herself. "But why does he come to me? Mr. Ducie would be the right

person. I am only the girl's stepmother after all."

"I fear you will think me taking an unwarrantable liberty, Lady Alice," began Vernon, glibly, "but I have made a discovery I think you ought to know."

"I am sure your intentions are kind," said his hostess, smiling, and yet feeling a little uncomfortable.

"I was thinking a cup of tea would benefit my headache," said Vernon, mingling truth and fiction in a very skilful way, "when I chanced to see a teatray being carried along one of the passages upstairs. I followed it intending to beg a cup."

"I understand," said Lady Alice, who was remarkably quick. "I can guess your discovery now. The tray you mention contained the schoolroom tea, and you have been making acquaintance with our little barbarian."

"Right," and Percy admired her perfect self-command, "but I should hardly have asked for a private interview to tell you this. I found the elderly lady who superintends my cousin's education—"

"Miss Blake."

"Miss Blake. I found her in a state of hopeless intoxication."

"Mr. Vernon!"

"I feared you would think me taking a liberty, but it is easy to verify my words. Send for the doctor and take his opinion."

"Miss Blake has been with us for years; she has lived in the highest families."

"The little girl told me she had these headaches very often, generally once a week. I gathered the state of things had been going on a long while, but had steadily grown worse."

Lady Alice felt after all her favourite post had behaved well; he had kept his secret to himself, and broken it to her with all becoming deference. Of course if he was right, Miss Blake would have to go, and Nan must join the family party.

"If only he had declared himself first," thought my lady, regretfully. "It will be an awful blow to the girls if anything goes wrong, and though, of course, Nan is nothing but a little savage, the fact remains she is seven years younger than Kitty."

CHAPTER III.

A MONTH had passed since Miss Blake left the Priory for "change of air," followed promptly, poor thing, by a cheque from Mr. Ducle, and a curt intimation her services would no longer be required in his family.

A month, I say, had gone by, and Nan was quite used to late dinners and drawing-room life.

Lady Alice was not a woman to do a thing with bad grace. Since Nan had to be admitted to the family circle, she made a virtue of necessity, and let the poor girl have as much kindness as sent the little barbarian half beside herself with delight.

It was October now, six weeks later than Percy Vernon's arrival in Blankshire. He had run up to London for the day at the request of his brother, and was now sitting *à-côté* with the Colonel in his cosy bachelor chambers in Charing-street.

There was a great contrast between the two—far more than the five years' difference in their ages would explain.

Hugh Vernon was grave and earnest, a man of deep feeling and rare generosity, and Percy—well, Percy has been described before. Ninety people out of a hundred would prefer his face to Hugh's, but the ten who favoured Hugh would assure you the Colonel was a man you could trust to be faithful to you through cloud and sunshine, through good report and ill; no one had ever said so much for Percy.

"I want to know your decision. It is high time you came to one."

And the voice has a sound familiar to us. We seem to have heard it before. It carries us back in fancy to the Rectory garden in the August

gloom; and we know that Florence Austin's uncle, Reginald Hughes, is no other than Hugh Vernon, sometime colonel in the—th Hussars.

There had been three of the Vernons originally, but the sister came first, and was so many years the eldest that Hugh was only five and Percy a baby in arms when her own little girl was born.

Florence Drake was far more the sister than the niece of Hugh Vernon and his brother. She looked up to Hugh with the warmest love, the tenderest esteem, but she never believed in Percy; and when Colonel Vernon's scheme for his brother's reformation reached her she condemned it as simple madness.

Hugh wanted to be on the spot, and see how his *protégé* got on. He knew he should be a welcome guest at the Rectory. Florence had never proclaimed her connection with the Ducle in his own family. He had always been known as "Rex," because from a child he had shown a kingly power of governing, keeping the old name of Rex in its more elaborate form of Reginald, and, using his Christian a little lengthened he became Colonel Reginald Hughes; and by keeping clear of Percy he had contrived to spend eight weeks very comfortably at the Rectory, without anyone in the least suspecting that he had any object but to enjoy the society of Florence Austin and her belongings.

But, alas! for human nature and good prudent resolutions; at five-and-thirty the Colonel fell hopelessly in love. He who had resolved on celibacy, who looked on himself as a confirmed bachelor, actually lost his heart, utterly and completely, to a girl just half his age.

It was absurd—he told himself so a hundred times—ridiculous to think that blue-eyed child would ever care for a world-worn soldier; but, all the same, the fact remained, and just as poor Hugh had resolved to risk everything and put his fate to the test, a report reached him that it was Nan on whom Percy had fixed as the good angel to effect his reformation.

The Colonel had argued with himself in vain. Love was stronger than all—the soul of honour. Not even for Nan's sake—did she accept him—would he take back his promise of giving up his claims to the Priory in Percy's favour; still his remaining fortune was so ample he could provide a luxurious home for his bride. He would not hurry the child; he did not want an unwilling bride. She should have ample time to learn to love him.

He had just decided to risk all, and in his own true character ask Mr. Ducle for Nan's hand, when the union hinted at arose. Hugh Vernon's course was very simple. He went up to Charing-street, and telegraphed for Percy to join him. Almost as soon as his brother was seated he came to the point.

"I want to know your decision. It is high time you arrived at one."

His heart beat so loudly he thought his brother must hear its throbs as he waited in agonised suspense for Percy's answer.

"I came to it long ago. Of course, I shall marry Nan."

There are moments when men and women feel an agony akin to death, and yet, so strong is human pride, they make no sign. They hide their pain by some supreme effort, and go on as though unwounded.

"Nan!"

"No one would look at the others when she was by."

"She is the youngest, I think!"

"Yes, just seventeen. A little wild thing; quite unformed, you know. I dare say she will give me a lot of trouble, but I shan't mind that. She'll be worth looking at in a few years' time. She has the makings of a glorious woman."

He might have spoken just in the same tones of a horse.

And this was Nan! Hugh's sweet child-love—the only creature he had ever longed to make his own. It seemed like degradation to give that pure, innocent life to Percy's keeping; and yet what right had he to interfere! Percy was younger, brighter, and in all ways more suited to her than himself. But oh! the pity of it!

"Do you suppose she will accept you?"

"I've no fear of that. Why, she's been treated little better than a servant all these years—been turned into a kind of family Cinderella, and all that sort of thing. I should think any husband would be an escape for her; and, hang it all, Hugh, I don't think I have often had to complain of a cold reception from women."

"Have you spoken to her?"

"I spoke to her father last night."

"And—"

"He is delighted to get rid of a daughter. I believe he regrets I am not a Mormon, in which case he could have the felicity of handing all four over to me."

"Percy, do be serious."

"Never more so. The old man was very gracious; feared his little savage was hardly a fit wife for me; thought either of her sisters better suited to the honour, but supposed I knew my own mind."

"And you?"

"I told him I meant to marry Nan, and that I should like the wedding to be soon, so that I could take her abroad for the winter. These English winds don't suit me at all. It is quite time I married and settled down, Hugh, I can tell you; I feel awfully used up sometimes."

"Your constitution has never got over that hunting accident four years ago."

Percy flushed.

He had the grace to feel a little ashamed. There were details connected with that hunting accident which few men could have recalled without a pang of remorse.

"Then I suppose you will speak to Nan at once?"

"Lady Alice was to break the ice for me. I rather fancy I shall be able to tell you my wedding-day by Thursday's post."

"You will return to-night?"

"No. I am going to the theatre, and there are one or two places I want to call at. I shall go to-morrow."

Some strange fancy took Hugh Vernon that he would return to Briarley that night. He wanted to see his pretty child-love just once more before she was his brother's plighted wife.

It was a short journey, and Hugh reached the little station just as the October afternoon was closing in. He crossed the bridge, and just looked into the waiting-room on the other side to see if Mr. Austin was there. There had been some talk of his going to London that night.

The Rectory was not there, but to his life's end Hugh Vernon always rejoiced he had peeped into the dingy little room. At the time he could hardly believe his eyes, for in the farthest corner sat Nan Ducle, a little black bag in her hand, and tear stains on her face.

"Nan!"

"Oh! Colonel Hughes. I've run away; don't send me back."

Hugh closed the door, put a chair against it, and went over to Nan's side.

"My dear child, what has happened?"

"Lots of things—but I have run away. The London train will be here in five minutes, and then I shall be safe."

Going to London with her sweet, childish beauty, her utter innocence of the world and its ways! Oh! thank Heaven, he had returned to-night. At least he could save Nan from her danger.

"If you are in trouble why did not you go to the Rectory?"

"Florence and Mr. Austin went to London yesterday."

"Ah!"

"And I was going after them. I had the money, and I know Mrs. Austin always goes to the Charing Cross Hotel."

"Nan, won't you trust me?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me what troubles you."

She blushed crimson.

"Mr. Vernon wants me to marry him, and papa and mamma say I must!"

"Don't you like him, Nan?"

"Very much."

"Then—"

"Oh!" and the girl wrenched her hand from

his grasp. "Can't you understand! Liking is not enough!"

"What more, then, do you want?" "Faith!" and Nan looked up at him with dewy eyes. "I do like Mr. Vernon. He amuses me; but he is not true. I would not trust him."

"Poor little girl!"

"Mamma says that is nonsense, and papa says I ought to be ashamed of myself; and they were very angry, so I ran away."

How his heart ached for her! And yet what a glad relief filled his mind! At least she was free. He need not count it sin that he loved her.

"Nan, what did you think of doing?"

"I had no idea. I meant to go to Florence. She would have been kind to me."

"And then?"

"I think," said the girl, wistfully, "she would have known what to do with me. I am not clever, but I can read and write and sing. There must be someone somewhere who has no daughter, and would like to have me for a companion."

"I should like you for my companion, Nan," said the Colonel, simply.

Nan looked at him with a strange, far-off expression in her eyes.

"It would be like a real home to be with you; but I had rather not!"

"Why?"

"Companions are sent away sometimes," said the girl, simply, "and I don't think I could bear that; besides, you might marry."

He saw no gleam of his real meaning had dawned on her.

"Don't you think I am too old to marry," he asked, gravely.

"You are not old at all! You are quite young!"

"And you will not be my companion?"

"No."

"Because you think I should be unkind to you, child?"

"Because you might grow tired of me."

"I should never tire of your company, little Nan—never, till death parted us. It is for always and for ever I am asking you to come to me as my much-loved wife."

"Your wife!"

"You said just now I was not too old to marry."

"I never meant—I never thought of myself."

"You told me a while ago you trusted me, Nan. Don't you think you could add love to the trust? Dear," said the soldier, stroking her fair hair, "this is no sudden thought. I should have spoken sooner, only I felt bound in honour to let Percy have a fair trial."

"Do you know him?"

"Intimately; we were boys together. Dearly as I loved you, Nan, I would not take from him his chance of winning a pure, true wife. I felt I could trust you, child; that unless you loved him you would never be his bride."

"I could not have married him," said Nan. "I should have always been comparing him with you."

"Do you know what that proves?"

"No."

"That you love me!"

A long, long silence. Never had two happier people sat in the gloomy waiting-room. Then the Colonel said, simply,—

"Nan, you must go home."

"But, mamma—"

"Leave that to me. Only keep firm in your refusal to accept Percy Vernon. I will meet him when he comes from London to-morrow, and tell him his cause is hopeless. I think he is generous enough to take the onus of explaining matters to Mr. Ducle and Lady Alice on himself; and I can promise you when once he is gone they will give me a patient hearing."

"And are you quite sure?"

"That I want little Nan for my life-long companion? I am positive! And are you sure, sweetheart, that you can give up all hope of being mistress of the Priory?"

"I never thought of that; besides, what is the Priory when I have you!"

CHAPTER IV., AND LAST.

MAN proposes. You know the old adage, reader.

Percy Vernon never returned to the Priory. He was taken ill on returning from the theatre, ruptured a vessel on the lungs, and was in extreme danger.

Hugh was telegraphed for before his engagement to Nan was four-and-twenty hours old; but he contrived to see his little fiancée, and assure her of his return as soon as he could leave Percy's sick-bed.

Meanwhile, with Mr. Vernon absent, she had nothing to fear from her parents.

Mr. Ducle and Lady Alice were much concerned at the illness of their future son-in-law, but their dismay reached its height when, about ten days later, they received a letter from him renouncing all claims to their daughter's hand, since his doctors told him he had not many months to live.

The girl who would not marry him shed bitter tears over his illness, and mourned very truly when, before the Christmas bells had chimed, the news came that the doctors had been right, and Percy Vernon's brief career was ended.

In the first weeks of the New Year Lady Alice was thrown into a tumult of excitement by a call from Hugh Vernon.

Very simply he told her the truth. He had loved Nan ever since the autumn. His brother had known of the attachment, and made it his last request that they would not delay their wedding for his sake.

My lady stared. Very strange it seemed to her that two such different brothers should have fixed their affections on little Nan.

"You are like poor Percy in one thing," she said, coldly. "You make very sure of the child's consent."

"I am as sure of it as of my love for her. You see, Lady Alice, the match with Percy was an arrangement. Now, I fell in love with Nan before I ever knew she was a Ducle, and at my age I am not likely to change."

So when the June roses bloomed there was a stately wedding in Briarley Church, and Karl Austin's voice was full of a deep sympathy for the happy pair as he pronounced the marriage blessing, for the bridegroom had been his boyhood's friend, and both he and his wife had loved the bride as a little sister in the dark days now gone by.

[THE END]

WARTS.—It is said that the common wart can be easily removed by small doses of sulphate of magnesia (Epsom salts) taken internally. Several children in the locality of Lyons, in France, were treated with three-grain doses of the salts morning and evening and were promptly cured of these unsightly excrescences. A woman, whose face was disfigured by warts, and who was cured in a month by one-and-a-half drachm doses of magnesia taken daily, is another example of the efficacy of this remedy. Very large and apparently permanent warts have been known to disappear in a fortnight from the daily administration of ten grains of the salts.

How many inhabitants the Egypt of the Pharaohs had is problematic, but it is doubtful if it had more than did the Egypt of the Ptolemys, and that was not more than eight millions. A couple of centuries ago, under the Mamelukes, the number had fallen to three millions. Under Mehmet Ali and his successors there was some improvement, and the census roll of 1875 was increased to six millions, at which figure, or a little less, it stood in 1882. Now, after scarcely sixteen years of British rule, the population is about ten millions. That means an increase of sixty-six per cent. in sixteen years, or more than four per cent. a year. It means that Egypt to-day, Egypt proper, not counting the vast realms of Equatoria and the Bahr-el-Ghazal, is more populous than ever before in all its history. That in itself is a singularly impressive and significant fact.

A LITTLE COMMON SENSE.

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CHAPTER I.

"THERE'S no use telling anyone, Tom."

Lena's pretty face has a slightly troubled look as she speaks; and she glances up at her tall, handsome lover.

"Why not tell! I don't care who knows," that young gentleman says, carelessly.

"Oh, Tom! There'll be—I know there'll be—such a—"

"Duce of a row—eh!" Tom breaks in, laughing. "Well, perhaps so. I tell you what, Lena. I want to tell them, just to try the effect. Suppose, to-morrow morning at breakfast, after they all come in—especially Sybil, who's always late, I get up and say:—'I rise to remark, and my language is plain, that I am engaged to be married to Helena Floyd. What do you think—'"

"Oh, Tom! you wouldn't!" And Lena's little hands close tightly on his arm. "Promise me you won't? Besides, I haven't promised positively. It isn't really an engagement, you know."

"What is it, then?" And Tom's laughing eyes rest fondly on the girl's sweet, flushed face.

"I don't know exactly. You—you say you love me, and I—I know I love you, and we are both glad that is settled. But we are just to trust each other without any engagement."

A peal of hearty laughter from Tom makes her blush still deeper and avert her face quickly from his darling eyes. But he gently turns her head again until he can see the sweet little face again, then bends and kisses her lips.

There are a few words between the lovers. He tries to extract a promise from her, but in vain.

So he takes five minutes longer, and then goes away lingeringly; turning out the gas in the hall—which is too high for Helena to reach—and closing the front door cautiously after him. Helena steals upstairs in the dark, and lies awake with burning cheeks—too happy to sleep—till the summer-dawn comes in at her windows.

CHAPTER II.

"You ought to have stayed at home last night, Tom," his sister Sybil remarks at the breakfast-table. "The Elysons were here."

"The saints be praised that I wasn't, then," Tom says, coolly.

"Where were you?" she asks, sharply.

"At Jones's, gambling away my substance. I lost all my money, and my watch, my horse and trap, my gun, and setter. Jones lent me my horse and trap in order to get home, and—"

"Tom!" bursts out Sybil, angrily; and Mrs. Wyndham's soft voice exclaims, reproachfully,

"Oh, my dear boy!" The Judge looks silently amused, and Sybil goes on, crossly, "What's the use of all that nonsense! You were at Mr. Floyd's."

"Very true; so I was," Tom says, tranquilly. "Can you point out any special harm in that?"

Sybil tosses her head. (She is a handsome girl, very like Tom, with the same fine dark eyes and rich brunette complexion.)

"No special harm—to you," she says, with emphasis. "Perhaps it might be unfortunate for Helena to imagine you meant anything by your constant visits. Of course she won't understand that it's only *pour passer le temps*."

Tom's white teeth glitter under his moustache.

"Oh, she understands it, I imagine," he says, in his easy, off-hand way. Then he leans back in his chair, and stares through the open window at Mr. Floyd's house. They are next-door neighbours; but Mr. Floyd, Helena's uncle, lives in a quiet, little cottage, while the wealthy Judge resides in a grand mansion, with a velvet lawn spreading wide around it.

Suddenly Tom starts and smiles; and an instant after rises from the table, and walks out on the lawn. He has caught a glimpse of Helena gathering flowers in her front-garden.

"Hallo! May I come over?" he calls. Helena turns from the white jasmine she is pulling, and sees him standing with one hand on the low palings just ready to vault over.

"No, indeed! You'll land in my verandah!" she exclaims, laughing and coming towards him, with her hands full of the fragrant white stars of jasmine. But in defiance of her, he does spring, clears palings, flower-bed, and all, stands by her side, triumphant.

"Oh! Suppose you had fallen!" she says, half-frightened, half-proud of his strength and grace. Her grand, handsome lover! Her sweet eyes fall as he takes her hand—both her hands, and all the sweet dewy blossoms she is carrying, and holds them in his warm, firm clasp.

"If I could only say 'good-morning' as I said 'good-night,'" he whispers, looking down at her fondly.

She is well worth looking at, this fair, fresh young girl, with golden gleams in her wavy brown hair, and a colour like a damask rose in her cheeks. The dress she wears is only a cheap white lawn, but it fits her lithe young figure to perfection, and is as fresh and pure as the jasmine flowers themselves.

She looks up now, laughing, into her lover's dark eyes. She is thinking there never were such eyes before—eyes of "black velvet and fire"—and never a voice sweeter and tenderer than his as he calls her again "my own little Helena."

"Helena!" comes a quick, decided voice just at this instant. She starts violently. There stands Sybil by the palings, looking full in her face with eyes that are much more "fire" than "velvet."

Lena's colour has deepened very prettily under her lover's gaze. It turns to fire now. Cheeks and brow and throat turn vivid scarlet under Sybil's sharp eyes; and Lena feels that Sybil knows her secret.

"Good morning! Oh, Lena, can you lend me a jacket-pattern? I haven't one that fits decently," that black-eyed young woman remarks, quietly.

"Yes, certainly," Lena replies—thinking; "What a goose I am!"

"I'll come over this minute, and get it, then." And Sybil runs round to the gate; and Tom has only time to whisper laughingly: "Never mind, we'll have all the evening together." Then he takes himself off to the village.

But they do not have all the evening together alone. Sybil is there, practising songs with Lena.

And the next evening she carries off Lena to sing with her at home; the Wyndhams' new grand being so superior to the little old piano at the Floyds'. Sybil seems seized with a sudden and violent mania for Helena's society; and when Mary Wyndham comes home, she follows her sister's example. Mary is gentler and sweeter than Sybil—also less clever and penetrating. But she is well managed by her elder sister. By-and-by it becomes apparent to Lena that they are "on guard" to prevent *tit à tit* between Tom and herself.

She is half-amused and half-indignant.

"Ah! you are too late, my dears," she says to herself. "We know each other's hearts; and we could trust each other, if we never met except under your eyes." But they do meet, of course. There are long summer-evening strolls together in the woods and fields outside the town, occasional drives in Tom's trap, with his handsome bay horse, and now and then a quiet evening at Mr. Floyd's, when Sybil and Mary are detained at home, and no one else happens to drop in. Still, it is not very satisfactory, and Tom chafes under it a little.

"Look here, Lena; I don't see anything of you; I don't know how it is," (Lena knows, but she does not tell him.) "I hate secret engagements, anyhow. If people knew you belonged to me they wouldn't be always bothering round—"

"Didn't I say it wasn't an engagement?" Lena laughs.

"Yes. But that's nonsense, little girl. I think it one if you don't."

"Tom!"—Lena looks at him very seriously now—"I'm afraid you oughtn't to marry me.

You ought to marry a brilliant woman of the world, to help you on in life. One with beauty, and sense, and fine manners, and—money."

"Very well, Miss Floyd. Find me a million-aress prettier, and cleverer, and better-mannered than you, and I'll consider the matter."

"Tom, she is found. She is coming to-morrow," Lena says, solemnly, but with a laugh in her eyes.

"Who!—what?—oh, Miss Rivington; Sybil's grand London friend! Yes, she's very 'swell.' I saw her at Brighton last summer."

"I wonder it didn't occur to you to fall in love with her then. It was so obviously the proper thing to do."

"Why didn't it occur to you to fall in love with George Ridgoley, last summer. There was a good-looking fellow with a fortune ready made for you. But you let him go back to London 'all forlorn.' Why was this thus?"

"Because—oh, because—you mustn't ask impertinent questions."

It is so pretty to see her blush, and laugh, and turn away her head! and so sweet to know that she has never loved anyone else but him—lucky Tom Wyndham!

CHAPTER III.

MISS RIVINGTON has been at the Wyndhams for two weeks. There is no word of her going away. The house is full of young guests—gay, fashionable people; and there is always something exciting going on.

Lena does not see so much of Tom as she used. Of course, he is obliged by courtesy to pay some attention to the young ladies visiting his sisters. Lena knows that; but it is a little hard to see him go driving or riding by with Miss Rivington—almost always Miss Rivington—while she sits dull and lonely at home. She begins to wish that handsome, self-possessed young woman, with the blonde hair and miraculously-stylish and beautiful toilettes, would go away. She is not jealous, but she hates—yes, I fear she hates—whatever keeps Tom away.

"How do I look, Aunt Nannie?" she says, one day, as she turns from the mirror smilingly to consult her aunt's eyes.

"Lovely, my dear! Come and let your Uncle John see you."

Lena does look lovely. Her dress is only the poor girl's livery—white muslin; but it is of a soft sheer stuff, that flows and floats around her like mist.

She wears no ornaments, but some old lace of Aunt Nannie's and a cluster of creamy roses at her belt.

"Why, my little girl—how magnificent you are!" Uncle John says, kindly, while the children stand round her in a circle, admiring.

"Lena, I bet nobody there will have on as pretty a dress as yours," little Katie declares. Lena smiles, and kisses the earnest little face. But she knows her dress will be very poor and plain compared with many dresses that will be in Mrs. Wyndham's reception-rooms to night.

Tom comes for her, and they go out into the soft summer starlight.

"Don't hurry, Lena," he says, as he draws her gloved hand through his arm and holds it clasped tightly. "These three minutes with you are worth all the evening to me."

After that does anyone think Lena envies Miss Rivington her wonderful dress, that looks as if it were of woven cobwebs covered with dew and sparkling in the moonlight? She is simply utterly happy.

"Miss Lena, how do you do?" Will you—may I have this next walk with you?"

She turns, and meets honest George Ridgoley's eyes. He is flushing and trembling like a girl.

"Why, Mr. Ridgoley! I didn't know you were here. I'm glad to see you." And she holds out her hand frankly, and smiles a welcome. She dances with him once—twice—three times during the evening.

"Lena, are you going to let that poor fellow sing his wangs again?" whispers Tom, during the one walk he is able to get with her.

(Continued on page 473.)

MY SWEETHEART.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE cab pulled up with a jerk, but before he could get down from his box to open the door for her, Mildred had already opened it and sprang out.

"Wait here for me," she said, handing him his fee, "and I—I will pay you the same to take me back."

"Very well, miss," returned the man, touching his cap, and thinking how very liberal she is for such a plainly-dressed young girl. "You will find me here when you return."

Mildred scarcely waited to hear his reply, for already the sound of excited voices had fallen upon her ears, and down the path she flew in the wildest terror.

A sharp turn in the path brought her in full sight of a scene that met her gaze and was indelibly stamped on her memory while her life lasted.

Standing scarcely ten feet apart, facing each other with raised revolvers, apparently ready for the command to fire, were the two young men.

Gregor Thorpe's face was white and set; his opponent was cool and calm, and even in that moment Mildred saw a diabolical, sneering smile upon his lips; and in that instant, as she stood spellbound, there was given the command to fire!

With a scream of mortal terror Mildred sprang forward and threw herself directly before Gregor Thorpe, and with the simultaneous report of the two revolvers, Mildred fell at the feet of the man she loved, weltering in her own life-blood.

"Oh, Heaven! Mildred!" cried Gregor, agast.

In an instant the greatest excitement prevailed. Both young men threw down their smoking revolvers and flung themselves in terror beside the girl.

But the doctor who attended Thorpe as his second was quicker than they. He had sprang forward in a trice, and raised the slender form with its dark head from the cold, dew-wet grass.

"Wounded!" he exclaimed, in a low, sharp tone. "Thank Heaven, she is not dead!"

Gregor Thorpe bent over her with a world of agony on his face.

"Oh, Mildred—little Mildred! why did you do this?" he cried, taking her hand in his.

"Oh, Heaven, Mildred, you are wounded!"

"I did it to save you," she whispered, turning her great, lovely dark eyes upon him; adding, pathetically: "If the giving of my life has saved yours, I—I am so glad—so glad!"

Thorpe buried his face in his hands with a deep groan.

"If I have been the cause of this, it will kill me!" he cried, hoarsely.

"It was Dudley's bullet that did the deed," returned the surgeon, grimly. "Help me take her quickly to one of the carriages; I will dress the wound there."

"I am sorry," cried Dudley; "I can never forgive myself for this. I—I am willing to let the affair drop here and now if Thorpe is."

"We will settle accounts on another occasion. This young girl, who must be my care until I see her safe among friends, must be my charge for the present," returned Gregor Thorpe, frigidly.

Dudley turned on his heel and strode towards his carriage, which was in waiting, and Thorpe turned his full attention to poor Mildred.

"Am I to die?" she whispered, as the doctor dressed the wound, not even swooning, but enduring the terrible pain as he probed for and drew out the bullet.

"I—I cannot tell you yet," he answered. "The bullet has grazed a vital spot. If it had passed a hair's breadth further to the right it must have pierced your throat. We can but hope for the best—only hope. Have you any request to make?" he asked, anxiously.

She looked up piteously into his face.

"Yes, if I thought I could not live," she whispered, faintly.

"Ask it," he responded, bending over her to catch the words.

"If—if I am going to die, I would give so much to die looking on his face, with his arms clasping me, my head resting on his breast!" she whispered, piteously.

The young doctor laid her back among the cushions, and with tears in his eyes went to where Gregor Thorpe was pacing up and down, and made known to him her request.

"Poor little Mildred," he said, pressing the doctor's hand, and almost breaking down completely under the message.

It had come to him like a shock. Mildred loved him—loved him so well that she had given up her brave young life to save his.

Without a word he followed the doctor to the carriage. She was lifted carefully and placed in his arms, and her prayer was granted. His arms were about her, her head lying against his breast.

"Mildred," he whispered.

It was all that he could say, his emotion was so great.

"You will search for Paula after—after I am gone!" she whispered, faintly.

His arms closed more tightly, convulsively about her.

"You are not going to die, Mildred!" he cried. "You must not die; you must live for my sake!"

A look that was almost one of glory passed over her face.

And in the excitement of the moment he went on, realising how deeply and truly she loved him.

"Oh, live, Mildred, and accept the life you have saved! Live for my sake—be my wife!"

The words were uttered all in an instant that were to sow such a harvest of woe. It would have been better for Mildred to have died in that moment in his arms than to have lived to face the future, whose dark clouds were at that moment drawing slowly over her hapless head.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. MORRIS was delighted over the news of the betrothal of her two favourites, and in the excitement of the moment it was decided that the marriage should take place as soon as Mildred was able to be about.

There were long, beautiful sunny days spent in the old rose-scented garden—Mildred sitting in the great invalid's chair and Gregor lying in the long grass at her feet under the old apple-trees, reading to her.

During those days gentle Mildred learned to love Gregor Thorpe with a love that was pitiful to behold.

She was content to sit and watch his handsome face for long hours, and during those hours her rosy day-dreams of the future—which she should spend by his side—were so beautiful they were like glimpses of Paradise to the girl.

Mildred knew little about love or the ways of lovers in general; she had not discussed the subject with young girls; she had read no romances, it never occurred to her that the reading of profoundly sensible books—books on history, science, and travel—were not those which other betrothed lovers read to their sweethearts. Anything that he chose to read pleased her. She could have sat under the apple-trees for ever, with her eyes closed and her hands clasped, listening to the heavenly music of his deep, rich voice.

Neither in coming nor going did he kiss the girl's lips. He had a deep, true, earnest affection for this heroic guardian angel who had saved his life, but it was more the affection of a brother for a sister than of a man for the young girl he was soon to wed; but never were words of a poet more fitting than those which say:

"Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

Her love for him was so beautiful, so sweet, so tender than it wanted only his presence to render her supremely happy.

On the very moment the impulsive words had been uttered, Gregor Thorpe regretted having spoken them. Of her love for him there was no doubt. She had done her best to give her very life to save his; but he realised that poor, pretty Mildred, with all her gentleness and goodness, was the last person in the world to inspire love in his heart.

But now seeing matters had gone so far, he told himself that he would fulfil his promise, cost what it might. Yes, he would marry her without love and treat her so tenderly, so considerately that she should never know the want of it. He saw plainly enough by her every word and action that she idolised him, and his heart beat with profound pity for her.

He dared not think of the future and how it would end. He did not love her with the love that he had always dreamed of lavishing on the young girl whom he should one day make his wife; but he meant to do his best to make her a good, true husband. But, oh, how sad a thing it is to marry without love! and the pity of it was that poor Mildred cared so much for him.

Mildred continued to improve rapidly, and Mrs. Morris began to prepare for the wedding.

"It is strange," she said one day to Mildred, "that you do not talk about your wedding-gown and finery. Most young girls could think and talk of nothing else; you have not even mentioned it."

"It is because I do not think it will be so very fine," returned the girl, with a pretty blush.

"My—my means will not admit of it."

"What in the world do you mean, my dear?" exclaimed Mrs. Morris, in amazement. "What has your means, as you phrase it, to do with it! Your wedding outfit is to be my gift, and I intend that it shall be quite an elaborate affair, and in keeping with the noble young man whose bride you are to be."

"I could never accept it, dear Mrs. Morris," murmured Mildred, with tears in her eyes. "Your little home here still has a mortgage on it, and you toil late and early raising your flower-seeds to support yourself. Oh, no, no, no! I could not let you lay out one shilling on me."

Arguments were all in vain; Mildred was gentle but firm.

"Well, my dear, how do you propose to get your wedding finery, then?" asked Mrs. Morris, in bewilderment.

"I have decided to accept that situation as cashier in the glove emporium which Mr. Thorpe once secured for me, and which is still open for me, and remain there until I have earned enough to purchase what I shall require."

"You are surely the most independent young girl that I ever heard of," declared Mrs. Morris. "But there is one thing you seem to have left out of the calculation, and that is that you will delay your marriage to Gregor many weeks, I fear, and 'delays are dangerous,' they say," she added, laughingly, little dreaming of the cruel prophecy in her words, and that the day would come when the girl would remember them with a thrill of horror at her heart.

Gregor learned of Mildred's determination with wonder, but he could not help but admire her independence of spirit.

Like Mrs. Morris he attempted to dissuade her; but when he saw how much she had set her heart upon this plan, he could say no more. And it was at length agreed that the wedding should take place two months from the time Mildred entered the employ of Messrs. Powell & Craven.

It was rather a trying position which she had accepted—two of her predecessors had been actually driven from their places—but Mildred Garstin was so sweet, so gentle, so lady-like all the girls took to her at once.

"We have secured a jewel in this new cashier," said Mr. Craven, the junior member of the concern. "She is well liked by the employés."

"Take care that her employer is not in love with her as well," laughed his partner. Young Mr. Craven coloured.

The girl's sweet, calm face, with its dark, sad eyes, had haunted him from the first moment he had seen it.

The lady cashiers they had formerly employed had made a point of falling deeply in love with

the handsome junior member of the firm and making a "dead set" to capture him in the matrimonial noose straightway. They had made his business life a burden to him, so closely had they pursued him, and now, to see this pretty young girl so little interested in him that she never raised her head or turned her eyes upon him as he passed, was something of a piquant novelty to him; so he fell to studying her, and the study interested him vastly, and he realised, too, that the girl was wholly unconscious of it.

On the first day that she had come to them, a heavy storm had set in at noon, lasting all day.

Just at closing-up time Mr. Craven's cab stood before the door, and the young man himself was just about entering the vehicle when he saw Mildred emerge from the doorway.

In an instant he was by her side.

"Will you permit me to take you home in my carriage, Miss Garstin," he asked, touching his hat. "It is pouring a deluge. Your umbrella will be little protection against the fury of the storm."

"You are very kind, sir," returned Mildred, gratefully, "but I will take the 'bus that passes the door here. They take me within a short way of my destination. I thank you very much, however, for your kindly solicitude."

He bowed, touched his hat, and left her, watching earnestly a few moments later from his carriage window, and sighed as he saw her hurry forward through the down-pouring rain and take the over-crowded 'bus.

Mildred had gone home happy enough and without a second thought of her handsome employer, for she was expecting her lover that evening.

Yes, she would have been happy enough had it not been for the one perpetual pain at her heart—the pain of Paula's mysterious disappearance and her continued silence.

She could not be convinced but that her darling still lived, although Gregor had unfolded to her by degrees how he had traced her to the row-boat with Dudley, and from there all trace was swallowed up, for he had his doubts about the detective's theory from that point.

On the day following the duel, the detective had taken matters into his own hands, determining to arrest the young man for the abduction of Paula Garstin, but upon searching for him he found his bird had flown. Dudley had sailed suddenly for America.

Dudley did not know who the young girl was who had rushed between Thorpe and himself. He knew that the bullet from his revolver had struck her, but whether the wound was fatal or not he could not be of course foresee. If it assumed a dangerous outlook, he knew that he would be wanted by the minions of the law, and he made good use of the opportunity the postponement of the duel afforded him to make his escape from the country.

In Gregor Thorpe's opinion poor Paula had been lost in the water that night, and all the detective's theories could not change his belief. And he never looked upon the fair, smiling, treacherous water without seeing in the glassy depths the blue of her eyes and the golden meshes of her bonny curls in the sunbeams that danced over the waves.

"We must mourn for her as one lost to us forever, dear," he would say very earnestly, as he held Mildred's hands soothingly in his. "I am sure if she were on the face of the earth she would come to you; nothing could keep her from you."

But even in the face of this argument, Mildred declared that her heart told her that Paula still lived.

CHAPTER XVII.

BUT to return to Paula. Never in her life had her thoughts been so confused as they were on that memorable drive to Mr. Barton's home on the banks of the Thames.

The girl fairly held her breath as the magnificent equipage turned in at last beneath a massive archway gateway, swept up a serpentine drive flanked on either side by the rarest of plants in

full bloom, and drew up before the long porch of a magnificent grey-stone mansion.

Paula almost held her breath in awe as she gazed about her.

"I hope you will be happy here, Mignon," said the banker, wistfully. "You shall have everything here that heart can desire or money procure."

"You are very kind," murmured the girl very constrainedly.

"She is very beautiful, but she has little affection or kindness of heart about her," he thought, with a frown darkening his fine old face.

The old servants were gathered in the main hall to bid poor Mignon's child a royal welcome, but Paula read instantaneously great disappointment on their faces when they beheld her.

"She is a thousand times more beautiful than Mignon Barton was," she heard them whisper, "but she is cold and proud; she has not the sweet, sunny disposition of Miss Mignon in those other days."

Still, they welcomed her warmly, and very soon she grew to be a general favourite with the entire household, and she queened it over them with all the pretty, wilful pride of a young empress.

Modistes attended at once to her neglected wardrobe, as the old housekeeper phrased it, and at the end of a week she had silks and laces and gleaming jewels that would have purchased a king's ransom. Her boudoir was a perfect dream of white and gold, and its furnishings with inlaid pearl and marble and magnificent pictures would have been fit for a queen.

No wonder the girl's head was turned! She was so young, and had known the bitterest poverty, and now to find herself surrounded by such splendour seemed almost like the work of some fairy's magic wand—some unreal dream.

On the first night that she lay down to sleep on her perfumed downy couch she thought of Mildred—of one sister enjoying all the gifts of the gods, and the other in the country poor-house! The very thought made Paula shudder.

"If I were to go to Mildred and tell her, she would make me give up all this luxury, and I would rather die than do it, for it is necessary to my very life after having it in my grasp; and, besides, Mildred won't stay there a minute after she can find something to do, and after this proud old banker dies, and I have the money in my own hands, I can do handsomely by Mildred—I can indeed," and she turned her curly golden head over on the downy pillow and fell asleep.

But her dreams were troubled. The face of poor Mildred, pale, wan, and pinched, came before her in her dreams, and twice during the first night under that roof she awoke with the name of Mildred on her lips.

There was only one thing which troubled Paula when she awoke the next morning, and that was that Pierce Dudley might cross her path in his search for her and expose her. But a strange fate seemed hovering over her. In picking up the morning paper which her new maid brought her to read while she sipped her chocolate, she read, to her intense delight, among the list of passengers that had just sailed from London on the *Eulalia* the name Pierce Dudley.

Then she breathed freely.

"I am safe," she muttered, trembling like an aspen leaf. "I have nothing to fear now."

She looked so fair, so fresh, so sweet and dainty in her pretty white mull morning-gown, with its dainty white lace ruffles and soft blue ribbons, when she came down to breakfast a little later, that the old banker was charmed with her. His eyes kindled and his stern mouth relaxed into a pleased smile.

"Good morning, my little Mignon," he said, gallantly conducting her to a seat at the table; "you look fairer than the morning itself!"

"Thank you for so pretty a compliment, Mr. Barton," she said, hesitatingly.

He looked up in astonishment.

"I should have supposed your own heart would have prompted you to call me grandfather," he said, slowly.

"I—I wanted to, but I—I did not know if you would care for it or not," she stammered.

"Why should I not wish you to do so? Are

you not poor lost Mignon's child?" he demanded.

She looked at him with startled eyes.

"Surely he was not doubting her already?"

was the thought that flashed through her brain.

"I suppose, Mignon, dear, I am too exacting with you," he murmured, huskily. "I forget that I am an utter stranger to you, as it were, and that young girls are shy and timid creatures, and cannot accustom themselves to great changes in a day. I must be more patient with you."

She looked at him with a quick, frightened glance from beneath her long, curling lashes.

"I—I will soon grow accustomed to being here with you, grandfather," she faltered.

"I have a surprise in store for you, Mignon," he said, as they were walking through the conservatories. "I have just concluded the purchase of a house in town. It will not be ready for us for some six or seven weeks yet. I realised that although I was happy here in this lonesome spot, it would be dismal enough for a gay, bright young girl like yourself. The young need balls, parties, theatres, and the whirl of town life to make existence happy for them, and you shall have all these, Mignon."

She thanked him with the brightest of smiles.

"Do you think you will like that?"

"Oh, so much!" she murmured, enthusiastically.

Paula counted the days, despite the happiness with which she was surrounded, until they removed to town, and then she was launched into a sea of gaiety so novel that it seemed more like a dream than ever to the beautiful, faulty girl who had jeopardised her very soul for wealth and power.

There was only one point of dissension between Paula and the banker, and that was in reference to a chaperon—Paula did not want to be annoyed with one, and the banker would not hear of her being without one.

Despite all her pleadings Mr. Barton was firm, and the upshot of the whole matter was, that Miss Dawes, a refined, gentle lady of some forty years, was engaged in that capacity.

Miss Dawes had been governess to young girls in different families for many years, but never had she met with one who puzzled her like this young girl.

The round of excitement which she craved was unnatural.

Miss Dawes protested against her accepting every invitation that came to her; but the girl would not hear of any cessation of pleasure.

"You will wear yourself out in your youth, Miss Barton," she said, anxiously, "and when your lilacs and roses are irreparably lost, you will regret it," she added; but Paula's only answer was:

"I want to crowd as much joy into my life as I can."

Miss Dawes thought that these were strange words; but she uttered no comment.

One afternoon the banker brought in tickets for a box at the opera that evening to hear Patti, much to Paula's immeasurable delight, little dreaming that that one event was to be the turning point of her life.

It was late when they entered their box, the theatre was crowded from pit to dome, as it always is when the divine Patti sings, but amidst all the fashionable crush their entrance created quite a sensation.

The old banker entered first, and anyone could see by his courtly bearing that he was someone of distinction; Miss Dawes entered next, pale, spirituelle and stately, but the lovely girl who followed her caught and riveted all eyes, and when she threw off her long plush cloak with its border of white ermine, they fairly held their breath.

No costume could have suited her better than the pale mauve she wore, with its tracings of silver and gold thread. Her corsage bouquet was of white hyacinths. Diamonds blazed from her shell-like ears and ran like a river of glittering, gleaming fire about her white throat, and even the pearl and gauze fan she held in her dainty white-kidged hand was studded with them.

No wonder men looked at this fair young girl

with glowing admiration, and plainer women with envy.

"Who is she?" was the question that ran from lip to lip.

"I read in a society journal last week that Mr. Barton, the millionaire banker, had brought his granddaughter home from boarding-school, and that she was soon to enter the social world."

"That is certainly she," was the reply. "Her lines in life have fallen in pleasant places—an heiress, and beautiful as a poet's dream!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. BARTON noticed at once the *furor* of admiration that Paula's—or Mignon, as he persisted in calling her—beauty excited, and his heart beat with pleasure. She was indeed a glorious object to lavish his wealth and all the love of his lonely heart upon.

He had not been to the opera for years, but now he took new interest in these festivities. During the first interval he swept the house carefully with his glass, explaining to Paula and her companion who this one or that one was.

"Do you see those two gentlemen sitting in the box directly opposite us?" murmured Miss Dawes, smilingly. "They have not taken their eyes off Miss Barton since the curtain was lowered."

The banker looked in the direction indicated.

"Why, bless my soul," he said, "if that is not Mr. Mansfield's nephew—yes, the nephew of a man who was my most intimate friend until he died!"

Those were the words that brought Paula down from her pinnacle of lofty pride to a realisation of what was transpiring around her, and the words struck her as a flash of lightning strikes a fair flower.

The roses she held fell from her hands, and a deadly faintness seized her; but by a violent effort she overcame it and raised her eyes to the opposite box.

One swift glance and she recognised Gregor Thorpe. It had only been by the merest chance that Mildred had not accompanied him. He had secured the box a week previous, that she might have the opportunity of hearing Patti; but when the all-important night came round, it found Mildred with a violent headache, and she begged Gregor to go without her, and he at last very reluctantly consented.

On his way to the theatre he met a friend and invited him to accompany him.

Thus it happened that the two gentlemen occupied the box directly opposite the Bartons.

At the moment Paula had entered the box, Gregor's friend's eyes became riveted on her.

"Look directly over the way, Gregor," he whispered, "and you will see the most perfect face you have ever beheld—a regular hour!"

Gregor Thorpe looked, and at the first glance a strange thrill shot over him from head to foot.

How strangely familiar the dimpled pink-and-white face seemed to him! But he told himself that it was the sheerest folly to imagine he had ever met the young girl before.

He knew it was Mr. Barton's granddaughter, for only a day or so previous he had met the banker in town, and he had told him that his granddaughter was in town, and had furthermore given the young man a very pressing invitation to call.

This Gregor had promised to do, and intended to keep his word because of the warm regard that had existed between his uncle and Mr. Barton.

Gregor thought of that promise now as he sat gazing spellbound at the beautiful face of the girl by Mr. Barton's side.

"I would give anything on earth to know that girl," declared Thorpe's friend. "I admit I am hard hit. Why, she is the loveliest creature I ever beheld, and I have seen women the world over."

Gregor smiled at his friend's enthusiasm; he was an artist, and therefore of necessity a beauty-worshipper.

"I wonder how I can ever manage to secure an introduction!" cried the young man in despair.



PAULA IS INTRODUCED TO GREGOR THORPE AND HIS FRIEND.

"I think I can manage it for you," returned Gregor, quietly.

"Do you know her?" he asked, his face falling considerably as he looked at his handsome friend.

"Not exactly," returned Gregor. And then in a few words he explained the position of affairs.

"And will you call?" asked the young artist, wistfully.

"Yes, once," returned Gregor.

"Why do you say once?" exclaimed his friend, with keen interest mingled with some suspicion and curiosity.

Gregor laughed.

"Because I have not the inclination, I suppose," he added.

But he did not follow the line of his thought out, and say that a young man who is betrothed, and who is soon to marry one girl, finds very little in any other young women to interest him.

During the first few moments of interval, however, he found himself studying the lovely face opposite quite as intently as his friend was doing, when suddenly he caught Mr. Barton's eye.

The old gentleman bowed and smiled, and gave a nod which certainly was meant for the young gentleman to come over to his box; and, as in duty bound, they arose and made their way in that direction.

Paula saw and realised it all, and she realised with horror too great for words that they were coming even before Mr. Barton mentioned it.

It was a moment of intense excitement. Would he recognise in her the young working-girl whose life he had saved on that never-to-be-forgotten day from which dated all her woes? Would he expose her, and fling her down from grandeur and wealth all in a single moment? or would her surroundings deceive him?

Paula had splendid courage. She said to herself that she would brave it out; that she would deny being Paula Garstin, the working-girl, up to the last minute of her life.

As in a dream, she heard Mr. Barton say:

"Mignon, dear, it is my wish that you treat these gentlemen affably, and press them to call upon us at our home. Mr. Thorpe was the nephew of my dearest friend. He is handsome, but I assure you he is no coxcomb. He can put his shoulder to the wheel whenever occasion requires. Some time since his uncle disinherited him for some fancied wrong, and made a will in favour of a dissolute nephew who is just the reverse of Gregor in every way. His eyes were opened at last by the company he kept. He followed him about for a week, and discovered enough about him in that length of time to confirm his worst suspicions. He disinherited him straightway, and made a will in favour of Gregor again, and upon discovering this and that his wealthy uncle was done with him for ever, what did the young scamp do but gather in every available penny that he could lay his hands on, and skip to America. This Gregor Thorpe is as much of a gentleman as the other was a scamp, and I, for one, was heartily glad to see Gregor reinstated in his uncle's favour. I think the young man must have just about come into his inheritance."

Paula was so busy apparently in watching the audience, the old gentleman doubted whether she had heard a word he said.

He turned to Miss Dawes, who had been an interested listener to this brief narrative, and he went on in an undertone too low for Paula to hear, but which reached Miss Dawes's ears:

"When my Mignon marries, which, of course, will be soon—she is so extraordinarily beautiful—I should like her to marry a man like this young Thorpe. In the present day, young men are not what they used to be. It is a grave matter to contemplate the giving of one's fair guileless young daughter to one of them. I know him to be a young man of exemplary habits; and, above all other things, I feel positive that no broken hearts can be laid at his door. He is not a ladies' man in any sense, in my opinion—such a man will never make love to a woman

unless he intends to make her his wife; there fore, I trust you will show this young man much courtesy, Miss Dawes," he added.

"You may be sure that I will do so, sir," she responded, heartily. "The young man, as you describe him, must certainly be a king among men—one of nature's few noblemen. He shall feel no lack of warmth in my greeting."

Although looking in another direction, Paula was listening keenly to all that was said.

Her heart beat so that she feared everyone near her must hear it.

Nearer and nearer drew the footsteps. Paula felt intuitively that her face was growing pale as death.

Would Gregor Thorpe recognise her? Oh, the anxiety of the thought was terrible to her!

The lights and the music were swimming about her, and the great sea of faces seemed to rise and fall like the waves of an angry sea.

Ah! would he recognise her or not?

The door of the box swung open, and the two tall, dark forms entered.

She heard her grandfather greet them, and heard Gregor Thorpe introduce his friend, then, in turn, Miss Dawes was presented, and they turned to her.

Paula never remembered in what words the presentation was made. She realised that both gentlemen were bowing low before her, and raising her eyes by an effort, she looked into Gregor Thorpe's face, and saw, to her horror, that he was looking at her with startled eyes.

(To be continued.)

THIS STORY COMMENCED IN NO. 1865. BACK NUMBERS CAN STILL BE HAD.

In fasting feasts, the sect of Jains, in India, is far ahead of all rivals. Fasts of from thirty to forty days are very common, and once a year they are said to abstain from food for seventy-five days.



"BERRY, WHAT IS TO BE DONE?" ASKS RONALD, DESPAIRINGLY.

BROWN AS A BERRY.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE following week is a gay one. A sporting eleven from a neighbouring station come over to try their skill against that of Raul Tol at cricket tennis, polo, and billiards. And the circle widens naturally as each man brings a small train of friends or relations with him; sweethearts with chaperons, or wives with their attendant bow-wows, as the case may be.

The weather is glorious; it is October, the fleet month in the year in the Hills, when Nature puts on her loveliest gowns, and changes them day by day, showing such infinite variety that one might well fancy her wardrobe as limitless as one as that of our medieval Virgin Queen.

The treacherous climate, too, seems to repent himself of the evil, and do his best to bring back what he has stolen from those who have trusted themselves to his tender mercies, restoring such glowing roses to the fair cheeks that had paled so fast, and such diamond brightness to the eyes ill-health and the heat had dimmed. One can only wonder that the thief has not been brought to book before without giving him time to reform of his own accord.

Each day the friendly combatants meet to decide their mutual strength; and the evenings are given up to such abnormal dissipation that even the fastidious participant of a London season could not utterly displease.

They had even rival belles whose several admirers form two separate cliques; and, strange to say, Eve is one of those who, for the time being, is raised to something of the unwelcome publicity of a professional beauty, while the second is that "other Mrs. Chester."

Raul Tol is very full now, and everywhere these two pretty women, both by some strange coincidence bearing the same name, but so widely different in appearance, are the subject of discussion.

Eve unquestionably bears away the palm, but she is better known, and, consequently, awakens less interest. On the other hand, the mystery that enshrouds the antecedents of the elder woman gives much cause for scandal.

The severer portion, which is by no means necessarily the sterner sex, declare that such secrecy cannot be respectable, and think their opinion approved correct by the fact that she never calls on anyone, confining herself to the acquaintances that hotel life necessitates.

That she is rich is certain, which of itself is often a successful covering for a cloven foot, and then she is as handsome as a "queen of old time," and bears herself with the unconscious grace of those who are born to reign.

Her age is a great matter for speculation, some declaring that her hair is powdered for effect, others that she is another Ninon de L'Enclos, with no better reputation if the truth were only known; and yet her conduct is sufficiently circumspect to satisfy the most exigent. Her only fault seems to lie in the secrecy which tinges every action with suspicion. Why does she flit about the country like an unquiet spirit, having no apparent tie to bind her to it? and why is she so melancholy as though she had lost all, while wearing none of the outward trappings of woe?

Wherever the pleasure-seekers congregate, her proud, white face is always seen, conspicuous for its beauty and sorrow alike.

Berry watches her with an earnestness that surprises herself. It appears to her as though she only frequented those gay scenes to study Colonel Chester and Eve undisturbed, and the latter remarks upon it at last to her husband,—

"Why should the woman stare so rudely at me always?" she asks, fretfully. "Why can't she look at the game?"

"Perhaps she is jealous at your sharing the honours with her," he returns.

"What honours?" asks Berry, sharply.

"Of beauty, and the admiration that naturally follows."

The girl looks him through and through. What has he to conceal? and has this other Mrs. Chester more real cause for jealousy than the paltry reason assigned?

"I think she looks more at you than at Eve!" she declares, meaningly, trying to probe him to the quick; but if he is disturbed he makes no sign. His eyes are lowered, and his moustaches droop so heavily over his mouth that nothing is betrayed.

"Modesty forbids my even attempting to explain that," he says, smiling easily.

And Berry cannot but admire his self-possession. She is sorry for him, too. He is looking so ill and harassed, and she opines the events of the last few weeks have been trying him over-much.

The green-eyed monster that he has taken to his bosom is repaying him after the manner of its kind, gnawing away at his vitals, and undermining his strength with its ceaseless ravages; besides, who knows what other anxieties he may have to bear! These self-contained natures are long before they show outward signs of decay, but, consuming away inwardly, astonish one at last with an unexpected and total collapse. The sins of his life, present and past, are working their own retribution, and the suffering entailed only his own heart knows, for he makes no confidant. Even his wife does not dream that there is anything amiss; indeed, she has little time for thought of other people's troubles.

Ronald is great at all sports, and throws himself into all now with heart and soul, regaining much of the equanimity that in these late perplexities he has lost. He looks so gay, sometimes, and free from care, that Eve waxes wroth, and then sad.

If indeed he has withdrawn his love and grown content with his fate, her last consolation is gone, and she cannot unselfishly rejoice at his cure.

Women can scarcely understand the case

with which men can put away pain for the moment, or the fact that with them love is not all-in-all. Their life is larger and less one-sided, so that even if they are deprived of the best they can still enjoy a lesser good; besides, amidst these prosaic occupations, Ronald is half inclined to doubt whether all that has happened is not a dream, or at most some whim of the colonel's which, if not opposed, will wear itself out in time. Common sense forbids him taking it altogether seriously, and Berry's manner helps him to regard it from a practical point of view.

She is as frank and friendly with him as she has always been, showing no *gêne* at his presence, no pique, when sometimes he absents himself from dread of meeting Eve's mournful gaze. Once or twice he catches himself wishing that she would take it as sensibly as Berry. Men are so apt to resent love that shows itself at an inconvenient time or place, as by the same token they are so little grateful for the love that is given them unasked.

Women feel a certain tenderness for even the least lovable of their lovers; but men have not patience to bear with any affection save only that which they have elected to return.

Was it not a man who wrote!—

"They say there is anguish in loving in vain,
But ah! 'tis a deeper and gloomier pain
To be ardently loved by the fond and true-hearted,
When the power of returning that love has departed."

Berry suffers the most at this time. She cannot but see that Eve is jealous and angry, and inclined to vent both the cause and effect upon her.

It is bad enough to have to meet Ronald day by day under Colonel Chester's eyes, but it is worse to know that always Eve's glance is furtively directed their way, and that every word or movement of either is made fresh food for misery.

She has not deceived herself in the least. She has spoken with Colonel Chester face to face, and knows that there can be no escape from his decrees. It is like the law of the Medes and Persians that altereth not, and she is content to bear the burden, cruelly heavy as it is, for as she cannot marry John Carew it cannot matter so very much what becomes of her.

She is too dispirited and despairing to be merely discontented; still it is a sacrifice, and as it is to be suffered for Eve's sake, surely she need not be the one to make it harder for her to bear; and just now she is in such need of sympathy.

Yet she is very brave, and, treating Ronald as she has always done, tries to disarm Eve's suspiciousness and wrath by accepting her little, spiteful sayings as jests, that should be taken in the spirit they are meant. Often her patience is sorely tried, but having volunteered her help she is determined to go on with it at all hazards, and save her sister even if it be against her will.

Another trial is that she is so frequently thrown into the society of Captain Carew. True he never speaks to her, but he watches her so wistfully that sometimes Berry feels almost compelled to go to him and ask him what it is he wants from her. There was a certain hopefulness, too, when he met her first after that interview with Eve—that interview of which she has never heard—that puzzled her more than all. Now he looks disappointed and rather reproachful, as though something had been stolen out of his life, and she were the thief.

He, too, has ample matter for speculation. How is it that now she knows all, as he supposes she must do, she makes no overture of reconciliation! Even if she be going to marry that fair-haired boy, who seems so little elated with his good fortune, so often absent from her side, that need not prevent her from doing tardy justice to his character, and accepting at least friendship from his hands.

Eve, too, who seemed so kind when he told her all the truth, seems impulsively to have changed. Her smile is always sweet, as indeed it would be to her deadliest enemy; but there is something in her manner that forbids his nearer approach.

Sometimes a maddening hope deluges him with delicious and seductive thoughts. What if

she is afraid of his influence over Berry! What if her coldness arises from the fact that she knows his love is returned and fears for the result!

He is nearer to the truth than he wots of, but he does not guess how much more lies in it than any outsider could suspect, seeing only the smooth surface, and not the strong under-current that is driving them all—whither!

It is such an unreal life, surely it cannot last. Chance has been against them from the first while seemingly playing into their hands. Complications so serious are unnatural and overstrained. Are the destinies of so many to hang on the warped will of one man, who is almost beside himself with jealousy and an insatiable desire for revenge on anyone—anyone, so only it be revenge, and that complete.

Berry sometimes thinks that there can be no unravelling of such tangled skeins, and that nothing but a fatal landslide or earthquake, sweeping them all in one moment from the face of the earth, could furnish an appropriate ending to a beginning so confused. Was it for a like reason that Pompeii disappeared, and Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire!

She breaks off her reverie here with a laugh that even to herself seems harsh and out of tune.

Surely this way madness lies!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"WHAT are you doing, Berry!"

"Sticking pins into Mrs. Lee-Brooke."

"My dear, what do you mean!" in a horrified tone.

"I mean her effigy. The idea is none the worse that it is borrowed from a superstitious age. It is an immense relief when I am more than usually irritated at what she does or says."

She holds up a small rag doll, the best imitation she could effect at short notice of a waxen image, and as she speaks gives it another vicious little dig.

"It is nearly full now," she complains, dolorously, "and I don't know whether to make a fresh one, or pull them all out and begin again."

"I certainly would not waste any more rags or pins either in such foolishness," says Eve, severely; but the severity is spoiled by a smothered laugh.

"I don't know," slowly, and very doubtfully. "I expect it is a sign of a depraved nature that I can never long possess anything without growing absurdly attached to it. I can feel my hatred gradually decreasing for even this; I—I think I had better have another."

"It is an amiable weakness, and promises well for Ronald!" sneers Mrs. Chester.

Mrs. Lee-Brooke in effigy is dashed to the ground, and Berry starts to her feet.

"Why can't you let me forget and be happy when I can!" she pants, indignantly.

"I daresay you will be happy enough when—when you have left me!" sobb out Eve, and the sight of the tears welling into her sea-blue eyes effectually disarms Berry. She puts her arms round her sister's neck and kisses her.

"Don't cry, Eve! don't, there's a darling!" she says, coaxingly, rubbing her brown velvety cheek against Eve's, which is tinted like a rose.

But Mrs. Chester declines to be so summarily consoled, and sobs on until the hysterical weeping has worn itself out. Then she ceases perforce, but keeps on dabbing her wet lace handkerchief where the tears have been.

"I am very, very sorry. I would not have vexed you so for the world if I had only thought."

"How could you say such cruel things!" asks Eve, raising her reproachful eyes to her sister's face.

"I will not again—ever!" declares Berry, earnestly, in her remorse forgetting what had really passed.

And on these terms a reconciliation was effected, not, however, lasting long. Fresh causes for offence are continually being unintentionally

given, and it is not in Berry's nature always to be so meek.

Only a week later another rupture occurs.

Ronald is seated in the drawing-room near the window, by Berry's side. He had met Colonel Chester on the road and been brought in by him, and though the colonel has left now he does not move from where he had cautiously placed himself.

By tacit consent the strangeness of the situation in which they find themselves is always ignored and useless discussions avoided. It is a delicate subject, and will not bear rough handling. So the two, who are lovers against their will, chat together about passing events, Ronald's late victories at cricket and polo being the chief topic of conversation.

Eve is at the further end of the small room, and has a book in hand from which she never lifts her eyes except to speak to the little child who is seated at her feet, babbling happily to himself over his heap of toys. Her silence is unnoticed. She never willingly addresses Ronald, nor talks more than is absolutely necessary to keep up appearances when he is there.

Presently Berry drops her handkerchief, and Ronald, in stooping to restore it, accidentally touches her hand. Both start. Then Ronald smiles, and Berry blushes a little—she scarcely knows why. But the incident, innocent as it is, and insignificant of itself, assumes a certain importance in the eyes of both, as Eve catches up the child from the floor, and, sobbing audibly, rushes out of the room.

Ronald starts up involuntarily, and walks over to the mantelpiece, where he occupies himself in pulling his moustache and staring moodily at the Japanese umbrellas that stand like a shield before the grate.

Berry bites her lips angrily, but does not speak. Sometimes everything looks so hopeless, and she gets out of patience. It is as wearisome as the task Penelope gave herself to do, while that classical Job, her husband, wandered over the face of the earth; all the web-weaving of the day being unravelled during the watches of the night. Indeed, it is worse than that, for Penelope worked so with an object, while in Berry's case it is another who renders all her working useless out of pure thoughtlessness and want of trust.

Does Eve really suspect her of being reconciled to this marriage! Is her self-sacrifice to be thus hatefully misconstrued? And can she only prove her innocence by retracting her word even now! She feels almost tempted to do so, under this fresh provocation. She is no saint, has never pretended to be one, and Eve in her trouble has become terribly irritating as well as irritable.

"Berry, what is to be done!" adds Ronald, despairingly.

"I don't know!" shortly.

"Things cannot go on like this. It is too wearing, too much to bear with no redress."

She taps her tiny foot impatiently on the floor, but vouchsafes no reply. Surely she is the greatest sufferer, and yet all combine to ignore what she is doing and has done!

"If Eve would only look at things sensibly! It is as hard for me as for her."

Again an impatient little movement from the indignant girl near the window. This is insult added to injury. Is it not harder for her than either!

"I beg your pardon, Berry, I did not mean to be rude, but you know what I mean," goes on Ronald, awkwardly.

"Don't apologise."

"No; but, Berry, you must allow it is dreadfully hard for us!"

"Oh! of course the pain is all yours," cries Berry bitterly. "Why should I complain! I have a young and handsome husband provided for me, and it is absurd of me to wish for anything more. True, it is not the husband I should have chosen, or who would have chosen me, but that is a mere matter of detail."

"Berry, forgive us! How ungrateful and how selfish we must seem, after all that you have borne with for our sakes!" cries Ronald, in quick remorse, coming over to her side, and

standing there helplessly, not quite knowing what to do or say next.

If she had only been his old friend and playmate he might have taken her in his arms, or smoothed her hair, or comforted her in a dozen different tender ways. But how can he forget that he has been her sister's lover, and is her's now through an accident as aggravating as it is strange? She is broken down utterly, and is weeping as though her heart would break; and the small figure heaving so convulsively with every passionate sob, appeals irresistibly to his natural manliness and good feeling.

Poor little thing! how they have neglected her, and even half unconsciously seemed to have held her responsible for all that has happened, with that cruelty of injustice to which we are all liable when our judgment is warped by the pain we feel. And yet, between them all, they have ruined her life! He sees it all now, and is only anxious to find some way of showing the penitence he feels.

"Berry! Berry! listen to me for a moment."

"I am listening," she sobs.

"It has all been a horrible mistake, and it is I, only I, that am to blame. I ought to have avoided Eve, knowing how weak I was, and how I have loved her from the first. It was madness to come here at all. But it is over now, and let you and I, dear, make the best of it we can. I am not quite a brute, and I will do my best to make you happy if only you will forget what has passed, and forgive me, if you can, for bringing you to this strait. You don't hate me, Berry?"

"N—no!"

"And I have always been fond of you, ever since you used to listen to my confidences about Eve—but we will not talk of her now," hurriedly.

"If only she had married you then!"

"Ah! if she only had!" says Ronald, with an answering sigh. And then, remembering himself, adds briskly, "But it will all turn out for the best, you may depend."

"I don't see that," returns Berry, somewhat doggedly. "Nothing can make wrong right, and there has been so much deceit and—"

She hesitates for a fitting word that shall express what she means and yet not be too severe on the culprit before her, who is already humbled to the dust.

"Don't mind saying it, Berry. I know as well as you that weakness carried to such an extent is downright sinfulness," ruefully.

"Don't think I am not sorry for you both. I am, indeed," says Berry, earnestly, looking up into his face, and her dark eyes filling again with tears at sight of his dejection.

"I know you are sorry, dear. You are the best little child in the world!"

"And if it should come to pass that we should be married, you and I, I will do my best not to let you regret it, or to repine myself. There is no reason why we should be unhappy all our lives, is there?" she questions, wistfully, trying to persuade herself as well as him that all is not so hopeless as it looks.

"No, no—none at all."

"And—and Eve!"

"Eve will do you justice by-and-by, and acknowledge we have taken the only possible course. But oh! Berry, I do love her so dearly!" pining up and down the room excitedly, as though endeavouring to walk his ill-starred affection down.

"Poor Ronald!"

"And poor Eve! I sometimes fancy she must think me a very craven lover not to carry her away out of all this trouble and turmoil, whether she would or not."

"I am sure she thinks nothing of the kind," interposes Berry in alarm.

"But Heaven knows it is not that," he goes on quickly, unheeding her remark. "Dearly as I love her, I could not bear that she should give up all for me—name, fame, and all that women hold most dear. I could not ask it, I would not take it if she came to me unasked. I would rather lose her for ever than win her so."

He stops in front of Berry's chair, half as though expecting a reply: and then, as his

mood changes, he pushes his hand impatiently through his hair, and throws himself down on a seat beside her.

"You will think me mad, speaking to you like this; but my heart is so full, and it is a relief to tell you all—all that is in my mind."

"Poor Ronald!" says Berry again.

The words are little enough, but there is something so sympathetic in the tone that the young fellow nearly breaks down, as she did a moment or two ago.

He clasps the little hand that is laid so timidly upon his coat-sleeve, and remains silent until he has command of himself again. Then he goes on dreamily,—

"I can remember so well how she looked that night when I knew that I had lost her beyond all hope. I am not generally learned in these things, as a rule. I could hardly tell you even the colour of a lady's dress, but I remember what she wore then. It was all white—soft white, cloudy stuff—that it seemed as if a breath might have blown away, only the great starry daisies held it down. She had three in her beautiful hair, too, and I watched them so hungrily hoping that one might fall. Heaven knows I wanted no such stimulant to keep my love alive."

"I remember it all, too," whispers Berry, softly.

"Then there was the voyage out, when I tried so hard to avoid her, and could not. The very sound of her voice used to draw me to her, even against my will. I could not stay away when she was so near, and no one suspected, not even the Colonel then. He seemed to fancy that there was someone else I loved in England, and had left behind me there; when we settled down he was always inviting me to his house. His house that was hers, too—a paradise, and yet an inferno!"

"Hush, Ronald, do not speak so wildly. I know he thought that. He said as much to us when you applied for an exchange."

"And he would not let me leave. The consequences are on his own head."

She shivers slightly.

"Try not to feel so recklessly about it all," she suggests, gently, looking a little shyly into his face, as though she could say more that was consoling if she dared.

A new barrier seems to have sprung up between them. This lover, that was her sister's, and she whose heart is so hopelessly given to another! Before, it had been so easy to get on together on their old footing of friendship; but once the ice is broken, and they have spoken out their minds, they can no longer even pretend to be on the same comfortable terms. Half-confidences are more fatal in this case than utter silence.

Even Ronald, preoccupied as he is, sees that Berry has something more vexing her than this trouble that they share; else why should she be reserved about her own affairs while discussing his?

He cannot but admire her as she stands before him so white and brave, demurring no whit at the evil that has fallen on her life, patient under her own suffering, and under that which she is bearing for Eve.

"It is not right you should be sacrificed for us," he exclaims, impulsively. "I will not accept it, for one. It is mean and cowardly of me not to have thought of you before. Be comforted. I promise you I won't be your husband against your wish, let what will happen."

"Why do you say that?" she asks, uneasily.

"Because I see you are not happy, and because I know it is we who are the cause!"

"Indeed, no! There is no other better fate possible for me. I will never be a wife at all if I am not yours."

She smiles soberly as she speaks, but there is no doubt as to her meaning what she says. For some reason or other she is determined, and almost content, to marry him. He sees this, and notwithstanding his bewilderment, grows in some degree resigned to his fate. She is so pretty, so good and sympathetic, far beyond the usual capabilities of her sex, whose sympathy is generally reserved for sorrows that they themselves have made. He does not know that content in this case is only another name for despair, that because she has no hope she has also no fear.

The blue having all faded from the sky, it matters little whether the gathering clouds are black or merely grey.

Mr. May strokes his moustaches thoughtfully, and looks down at her in some trepidation as she nervously interlaces her fingers. Surely she is not going to become troublesomely sentimental too! Like all men he has a wholesome terror of women's tears, except those which he has the license as well as the wish to kiss away.

"Don't bother about it, Berry. It will all come right," he assures her, hastily. "And I will be as good to you as I know how. I shall never forget what a brick you were!"

"I know, Ronald," she reassures him, smiling.

"We will go away from here. We will go to England and settle down a model couple. Where would you like to live, Berry?" he asks, trying to look hopeful and bright as though the prospect had a charm for him, which, in fact, it has not.

She hesitates a moment, fearing the place she would like to have suggested might not find favour in his eyes. She had been so happy there when she was comparatively a child, and had only Eve's love-troubles to discompose her.

"No, no, not there!" he interposes quickly, reading her unexpressed thoughts in her eager, kindling eyes. "Anywhere else in the wide, wide world; but not within a hundred miles at least of Sarchedon Villa."

He speaks the somewhat bombastic name, savouring as it does of a second-rate locality, after a reverent pause, as one might speak of Heaven in a hushed cathedral aisle, where all around tends to give solemnity to thought and speech alike. Everything is not in a name, or, if so, some great nature and pleasant places have risen above the difficulty and conquered it. The nomenclature of Horatio Cokes might tempt a schoolboy's mirth, but only until he had read of his gallant keeping of the bridge; and Cape Cod is as pretty and picturesque as the Vale of Avoca itself, although celebrated in no poet's song.

Berry flushes a little with a feeling which, if not exactly jealousy, might become so if circumstances combined to foster it. But smiling bravely still, she reaches out her hand.

"We will talk it all over some other day. I must go now. Eve will be wanting me; and I hear the Colonel's voice outside."

And then slips away from him, cleverly avoiding Colonel Chester as he enters from the hall, and pretending not to hear him when he calls. He cannot always expect to have his victims to amuse him; even the man-eating giant that Jack mounted the beanstalk to eventually kill was sometimes defrauded of his dinner, and that notably, as the story goes, by his wife. Women are generally more than a match for a man, even when that man happens to be a giant.

CHAPTER XL.

"MAN proposes and woman disposes," is the paraphrase of an old saying that was no doubt originated by the author of that other aphorism which is equally familiar—"What woman wills, heaven wills."

Ronald's good resolutions of forgetting Eve are all cast to the winds when, calling next day at the bungalow, he finds himself in Eve's presence.

She is seated in a low chair, with her work fallen to the floor, and her lovely eyes gazing into vacancy; in her white gown she looks something like the heroine of Calderon's pretty picture, underneath which is written: "Her eyes are with her heart, and that is far away"—the unfashionable attire which is forced upon Anglo-Indians proving with her as becoming as in most cases it is disastrous in effect.

He has entered unannounced, but as she rises to her feet and hurriedly touches a bell beside her, he sees she is holding her sleeping child.

"Good morning, Ronald," she says, coldly.

He mutters an embarrassed reply to the salutation, and before he could say more, a kit-bag enters for his orders.

"Tell the Miss Sahib who is here," says Mrs. Chester, and retreats herself, hushing the child

ostentatiously in her arms, as though it had been awakened by the interruption.

"How fond you are of it!" observes Mr. May, jealously, and manlike, disregarding of sex, when the infant's heavy breathing makes futile further pretence.

"Why should I not be!" raising her sad and angry eyes defiantly to his face. "I—I have no one else."

"There is Berry."

"She is engaged to you," as though that were reason sufficient.

"And—and your husband," he suggests, with something like shame, and yet feeling that he would like to divert her affections to one of these two, whose rivalry he has no cause to fear.

He knows his most formidable rival is her child.

"Why should you interest yourself in my affairs? What is it to you whom I love?" she asks, indignantly, annihilating him with a glance. "It might have been all the world."

"But it is not. I have not forgotten, if you have, that you are going to marry Berry."

"Against her will and mine."

"It has not seemed so," drily.

"Things are not always as they seem, and, Eve, you might know by this time who it is I love."

"What is that to me!" stooping to kiss her child to hide the dangerous light that has come into her eyes.

"Nothing now," he admits, humbly. "I almost doubt whether it ever has been more."

The aspersions sting her to the quick, the thoughts of both having flown back to that meeting on the hill when she had openly confessed her love, and when Colonel Chester had surprised them in their last farewell.

"If only we could have remained as we were!"

"That was not possible," firmly.

"In my case—yes."

"But not in mine."

She is silent.

Her eyes meet his for a moment, full of sweet madness and unutterable love.

Half unconsciously he raises a hand before his eyes as though to shield himself from a noonday glare. How can he look at her and keep his strength? He repeats his last words, as though repetition might give them force.

"Not in mine. I am not my own master now."

"The bondage is so evidently pleasant to you that I need not, I suppose, console!" with a vein of sadness running through the satire.

"Why do you first tempt and then taunt me?" he cries, excitedly.

"I do not mean to do either," hastily.

"Surely it is hard enough to do right!"

"Is it right to marry one woman when you—"

"Love another!" he suggests, somewhat gloomily.

"Or—or said you did."

"You need not doubt it. It is quite bad enough to be true!" bitterly.

She lays the baby on a couch and makes a movement towards him.

"It is bad enough for anything," she says, in a smothered voice.

"Poor little Eve!"

"It is such a hideous mockery—such humiliating deceit!" wringing her white hands.

He bows his head in assent. It is all she has said, and worse. Galling as it seems to her, is it not even harder for him to bear—he a man whose profession is warfare not subterfuge, and whose every instinct is against this underhand course they have been obliged to pursue?

"I lie awake all night, thinking, thinking, until I nearly scream aloud in impotent pain. I am wearing myself to a shadow with worry and remorse. See!"

She bares a transparent, blue-veined wrist, and holds it out pathetically. Ronald has need of all his firmness and good resolutions not to press his lips upon it as it drops again limply to her side.

"I would have died to have saved you from sorrow like this!" he says, in simple earnestness.

"It is there trying scenes, day after day, that

I feel so cruelly. I shall never be myself again until they are ended."

"What do you wish me to do?" he asks, with a puzzled air.

"Be true to me!" she falters.

"I am! I will be, even if it makes me false to all else?" he asserts, wildly, losing his head a little under the influence of her voice and glance, all the subtle charm that lies in the presence of a woman who is dear.

"And—and, Ronald, do not marry her! Do not marry anyone while loving me!"

She droops her head to hide the blushes that are mantling at the boldness of her own words. Her heart is beating so fast she can feel nothing else. He himself is as discomposed as she. He tries to speak and fails. Then he grasps her hands and holds them tight.

"I hardly know what you mean!" he says, at last, agitated and terribly bewildered. "Don't you understand we are doing it for your sake!"

"Yes!" with a faint accent, however, of doubt, or perhaps it is displeasure.

"To save your name," he continues, gravely.

"Yes," she says again.

"And to rescue you yourself from your husband's jealousy and suspicion, it might even be revenge."

She frees her hand with an impatient wrench, and turns from him fretfully.

"I know all that; I have heard it over and over again until I am tired. Of course it is the same to me, but supposing—suppose I don't want to be saved—so!"

The slightest gleam of coquetry, more in a movement of her shoulders than in what she has said, makes him step forward, and he stands so close he can almost hear her breathe. He catches a fold of her dress as it falls across his foot, when seeing him so near she tries to move away. He sinks upon his knees.

"I am yours—yours only. Do with me what you will," he whispers, hoarsely.

"It is not much to ask," she answers with a deprecating look that turns into all tenderness as she meets his upward gaze. "I only want you to spare me this trial, which is more than I can bear. I want you to speak to him—to my husband—and tell him that it cannot be. Tell him that you will go away at once and never come back again. Promise anything and everything, only end this farce."

"And I shall never see you again!" slowly.

"Never—never!" she repeats with sweet solemnity; and then, overcome with all the thoughts that the saddest of all words, fittest refrain for a funeral dirge, has brought crowding into her mind, she sinks into a chair and covers her face with her hands. "Don't you see how it is now!" she says, again, when he is silent. "I am not myself at all, or at least only my worst self. I am unjust, selfish, and distrustful, I know, but consider how sorely I am tried. It is like losing you by inches—it is slow torture—it is suffering a thousand deaths each more horrible than the last."

He buries his face deep in the soft, white muslin that he holds, and yet feels he ought not to dare to touch even the hem of her gown. If love might be gauged by sorrow, how unworthy a passion is that which he has laid so confidently at her feet! He is ashamed of the sluggishness of his feelings, the love that can argue *pro* and *con*, the grief that can dream of consolation even in its first flush. The intensity of a woman's emotion is always a wonder to a man whose finer impulses are necessarily blunted by contact with the world, and whose agonies and joys are laid on more practical foundations.

"Will you speak to him?" she murmurs.

"I will!"

He starts quickly to his feet as a footstep is heard outside. The next moment Berry enters the room, smiling. A burden is off her mind since the conversation of yesterday, and she goes towards him quickly, trying not to feel constrained or shy. She does not notice the discomfiture of both—he, standing awkwardly in the centre of the room, having evidently been routed from an easier attitude; and Eve, banding with exaggerated interest over her child as it still lies, with the wonderful and enviable powers of som-

nolency peculiar to childhood, sound asleep on the couch.

"You are earlier than usual to-day?" "Am I?" is the lame reply. "I could not come before; I was busy. What have you been doing in my absence?" she queries unsuspectingly, indeed more with the object of making conversation than any curiosity she feels.

Eve flushes guiltily. If Berry is indeed anxious for this marriage, as often she has indignantly asserted to herself in her frequent fits of senseless jealousy, what will she think of this plotting behind her back?

It is like fighting in the dark, or striking an enemy unawares.

Or, granting she is wedding against her will, as she has suffered so for their good, have they any right, without consulting her, to nip the heroism in the bud?

There is a certain glow about self-sacrifice of which one would not always care to be deprived. It is doubtful whether Quintus Curtius would have thanked anyone for holding him back from the yawning gulf, even if, at the same time, it had been shown that the deed would have been in vain.

With these misgivings in her mind, she says, half apologetically, and yet with a touch of defiance in her tone,—

"We have been talking things over, Ronald and I, and we have come to a conclusion which I think you will approve."

"Of course, I must approve, since you two have decided! What is it?" queries Berry, brightly.

Eve hesitates a little how best she can frame a reply, and Ronald does not help, knowing how weak he will be rightly judged when all is told.

"Ronald is going to speak to Colonel Chester!" says Colonel Chester's wife, with an attempt at dignity.

"About what?" asks Berry, provokingly slow of comprehension.

"About this engagement; to break it off, in fact! It ought never to have been! We ought to have resisted long ago!" answers Eve, speaking hurriedly, with an idea of hiding her confusion.

For a moment Berry glances at Ronald, pitiful a little, but more contemptuous of this quick changing of his intentions. Then she sits down and calmly devotes herself to some work that is in her hand.

"It is as you like, of course; but I warn you that it will be of no use!"

"Why should you say that?" asks Eve, aggrieved.

"Because I know!"

"How?"

"I spoke to him a month ago!"

"When? Why? What did you say?" and "You never told me!" exclaims Ronald and Eve, almost in a breath.

"What was the good? I made my venture, and failed, as you will do!"

Mr. May looks at Mrs. Chester half as though agreeing with what is said. It sounds sensible, and there is always something practical in the teachings of experience.

"You promised!" Eve reminds him, reproachfully anticipating his objections.

"And I will do it!" determinately. "Where is Colonel Chester now?"

"In the library alone."

"Then I will go at once! Wish me luck! Heaven knows you have both good reason!"

Forcing a smile, and waving his hand gaily in farewell, he swings out of the room, banging the door somewhat ostentatiously behind him.

A private interview with Colonel Chester is no light matter, as the two women left behind can testify.

They exchange scared glances, and then return with affected interest to what they were doing before, Berry bending over her work, and Eve kneeling down by her boy's side, as though fear and affection both began and ended there.

Half-an-hour passes in foreboding stillness—the stillness that often precedes a stirring event. Then the sisters start nervously as a sound is heard through the silent house, footsteps hur-

ing across the hall, and then halting a moment before the door is actually pushed open.

It is Ronald staggering in like a drunken man, all the colour driven from his face by some violent emotion.

"What is it?" asks Mrs. Chester, lifting her lovely face to his, and in her excitement laying hold of his arm.

Even Berry, although she has professed to be without hope, cannot refrain from an eager questioning glance.

"The man is a fiend incarnate!" he ejaculates, forgetting in his excitement whom he is addressing.

"What do you mean?" shrinking back and letting her hand fall again to her side.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Chester. I meant to say I had failed. Miss Cardell was right!" he returns, constrainedly.

"I knew," murmurs Berry, with none of the triumph in her tone that is generally discernible in the prophets. "I told you so."

"Then you have done nothing!"

"Nothing good," evasively.

"Nor bad, I hope!"

"I don't know what you may think it. I don't know what you will say, but—but—"

He stops shamefacedly; a little chary of confessing how completely he had been worsted in the fight.

"But what?"

"The wedding-day is fixed for the 19th of next month."

CHAPTER XL.

"BERRY, what is all this I hear from Lady Blanche?"

It is Major Lennox who speaks, and there is such a fatherly concern in his voice, that the girl nearly puts her arms round his neck and kisses him. He has only arrived some two days ago, and has lost no time in seeking out his little friend of bygone days.

His wife had imparted to him some of her suspicions, and his knowledge of the circumstances fills in the rest; he guesses that likely enough she may need a friend, and that she has one now he has assured her in almost his first words. She does not doubt, and as she lays her little hands in his great broad palm, feels as though she had gained a parent too. Indeed, he is infinitely more dear than the father she has lost, more loving and more careful of her happiness.

"I suppose you have heard the truth?" she answers, avoiding the candid eyes that are trying to meet her own.

"You are going to be married!"

"Yes, I suppose it is coming off. This looks like that sort of thing, don't it?"

She rustles her fingers through a mass of square white envelopes that are lying on the table. Some are directed, some blank still; but conspicuous on each is a big silver monogram that tells its own story.

"Yes, it does 'look like that sort of thing,' I must confess!" smiling kindly.

"There is one for you, of course. I should like you to have given me away, only I suppose it would not be correct. It is Colonel Chester's business."

"And I am not sure I would accept the office were it offered. I should want first to be assured it was for your happiness as well as his."

"His! Whose? Colonel Chester's!" laughing merrily.

"No; this young May I mean. It is a great thing for him, of course."

"I wonder if he appreciates his good fortune?"

"He cannot fail to do that. I don't mean to flatter you into believing that Eve is not the better looking of the two, and I know he liked her first; but I contest that this is the only advantage which she has. Your little finger is worth her whole body, beautiful as it is."

She smiles a little at his enthusiasm.

"You were always partial, major."

"I always loved you like my own child, and

so does my wife, I know. I wish we could see you well through this."

"It is what most people go through at least once in their lives," demurely.

"My dear, you can't deceive me so. Laugh and joke as you will, I miss the old ring in your voice, and the lightness of your step. Just now when you came in and welcomed me your gait was as steady as a matron's, steadier than many I have known."

"One grows older!" she suggests.

"Never very old at seventeen, or is it a year more?"

"I am eighteen."

"Not a Methuselah, you will admit."

"Some people are naturally older than others!"

"Fiddle-de-dee!" he ejaculates, good-naturedly, disregarding of her evasion, and then adds, earnestly, "come, tell me all about it. Why are you unhappy, Berry?"

"I am not unhappy!" is the reply, less truthful than brave.

"Barry!"

"I mean," averting her eyes to escape his reproachful gaze, "not more than everyone else is, I suppose."

"That is taking a gloomy view of our poor human nature."

"Woman's nature!" she corrects; for it seems, in the dull content born of her great despair, that she is only paying the usual penalty of her sex.

Already imbued with the tenets of the country in which she has lately lived, she can readily believe it is woman, not man, who is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upwards; and is she very far wrong?

The saddest plea ever urged in excuse of a crime horrible in itself, but nearly justified by the circumstances that caused it, was that of an Indian woman who had murdered her female child.

"Would to Heaven that my mother, when she brought me into the world, had had love and compassion enough for me to have spared me all the pains which I have endured unto this day, and am to endure until the end of my life! If my mother had buried me as soon as born I should have been dead, but not felt death, and she would have exempted me from that death to which I am unavoidably subject, as well as from sorrows that are as bitter."

It is terrible to hear such a complaint from the lips of one of that nationality which are not supposed to have sufficient intellect for thought!

Cruelty and injustice must both have been great to have gifted them with momentary reasoning power. And though that was a cry out of the long ago, matters cannot have altered much since then.

It was a poet in our own time who put another mean almost as bitter into a woman's mouth:—

"Why should I live? Do I not know

The life of woman is full of woe?

Telling me, and on, and on,

With breaking heart and tearful eyes

And silent lips, and in the soul

The secret longings that arise

Which this world never satisfies!

Some more, some less, but of the whole

Not one quite happy—no, not one!"

Sorrows that are misallied painful are often as hard to bear as more practical woes.

The tears are welling into her great dark eyes, and Major Lennox has difficulty in keeping his language within what used to be parliamentary bounds, knowing how girded and harassed she must have been before coming to this pass.

"We never liked the Colonel, you and I!" he begins, making the first move in a game he hopes to win.

"I did not. You called him gentlemanly, if I remember right, and said that was everything," she retorts, mischievously.

"A gentleman! A madman was the right term, I think. His jealousy of Eve is notorious and ridiculous; and now he is plotting to get rid of you."

"Not so mad at that. I was never a desirable inmate of any house where tact was necessary. I have a horrible habit of blurring out what I

think, and otherwise making myself disagreeable."

"My wife and I are willing to risk that if you will come and live with us."

"Live with you!"

"I mean there is no necessity for you to marry for a home. So long as we live there is one open to you, where you will always be a loved child and honoured guest."

She understands then, and the tears that are in her eyes drop slowly one by one. She appreciates the offer at its full worth, knowing his straitened means, and that he would incur the colonel's fiercest wrath for interfering in such a case.

She does not, however, contemplate accepting it for a moment. It is too late for any such half measures now.

"You are very good to me, Major Lennox," she murmurs, gratefully; "very, very good, both you and Lady Blanche, but—"

"But you will not come to us!"

"I cannot."

He does not combat her resolution, feeling that there is more in this than is visible at first glance. Laying his hand upon her ruffled hair, he forestalls her impulses of a moment or two ago by kissing her gently on the forehead.

Wheeling quickly round with unaffected childish grace she stoops and imprints a return caress upon his hand, and then goes on stroking it tenderly.

"My more than father," she whispers.

"My dearest child!"

There is a moisture in his eyes which I do not think his wife would have resented had she seen. Hating no one, she has certainly a stronger affection for Berry than anyone else out of her own family, and she knows her husband shares the feeling too. It was, indeed, at her instigation that he came to-day with the proposal that Berry has been obliged to reject.

(To be continued.)

A LITTLE COMMON SENSE.

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(Continued from page 465.)

"Who! Oh! Why, Tom, he has forgotten all that. I'm just an old friend, you know."

"Very likely," says Tom, dryly. "But I'd like to tell him you are engaged to me."

"No, Tom, you won't—you mustn't!" Lena whispers, eagerly.

Tom looks at her rather strangely. The truth is, already he has heard Sybil and Mary laughing together about "Lena's flirtation with George Ridgeley," and he doesn't quite like it. When the wait is over he finds her a seat, and stands looking moodily on, while George makes his way across the room towards her. But, five minutes afterwards, Lena sees Tom talking gaily with Miss Rivington, as he saunters up and down the wide hall with her.

"He is all devotion apparently," a very distinct sharp old voice behind her says.

"Oh, that is Tom's way, you know," Sybil's voice responds, gaily. "He's a dreadful flirt."

"Oh, we heard about them at Brighton last year. But come, confess you would like her for a sister-in-law."

"Oh, of course we like it! There! Dear Mrs. Morton, I don't know what Tom and Alice would say to me for breathing a word. I am so careless! Please don't betray me."

Sybil slides away with a laugh; and Lena sits very still and quiet, with her heart throbbing fast and hard.

It is not true! She will not believe it! That Tom, who loves her—who is engaged to her—could— But, alas! she remembers that he is not engaged to her. How often has she herself declared that he is free—there is "no engagement." "They were only to trust each other." But if Tom finds he loves some one else better, she cannot blame him or reproach him. He is free! Her happiness turns to dust and ashes on her lips.

Presently she slips out of the window near her, unnoticed (she has sent George away from her on some pretext), and glides like a ghost across the lawn. There are numbers of people straying about in the starlight. As she passes near one couple, she sees a glimmer of cobwebs strung with dew, and hears her lover's familiar laugh. Her lover! Is he here or Alice Rivington's!

She glides away into deep shadow, and is gone. No one misses her but honest George, who comes hurriedly back to look for her, but fails to find her.

Two days after, Sybil comes over to Lena's early.

"Sorry you had a headache yesterday, Lena. I wanted you to come over and see Alice again. Do you know she took such a fancy to you! She says your colour and the wave in your hair are just irresistible. Oh, by the way, did you know Tom went home with her yesterday!"

Sybil stops to laugh, and goes on again, gaily.—
"Yes, indeed! I wasn't surprised. Of course, I have been suspecting all the time. I confess I shall be perfectly delighted to have it all settled. She suits him and us so exactly."

"She is certainly very beautiful!" Lena manages to say, calmly.

"And so George Ridgely is as devoted as ever, Lena?" Sybil exclaims, presently. "My dear child, what are you thinking about not to accept him! Take my advice, my love, and if he asks you again, say yes. He's the best fellow—and no end of money."

And Sybil goes away, leaving Helena to break her heart with doubts that are almost terrible certainties. Tom goes with Alice Rivington, and without a word to her? No message—no letter!

"Oh! If he does not love me, why did he tell me so a thousand times? Was it only flirting after all! Sybil says he is a flirt. Oh, what shall I do without him! Oh, if I only knew the truth!"

The truth, poor little Helena! Sybil could have told it if she had chosen. Sybil knows that when Tom had discovered, the night before Alice Rivington left, that his father wished him to go North on business, he had gone over to see Lena. "Lena has a headache, and mamma says we mustn't let anybody disturb her," little Katie says, at the door. In fact, Lena had fallen asleep; and before she waked, careless little Katie had forgotten all about Tom's visit.

But Tom made another effort to reach Lena.

"Look here, John! There's a letter on my mantelpiece I want you to take over to Mr. Floyd's." Sybil heard—overheard—Tom saying to one of the servants just before the carriage came to take them to the train, which passed the station at the "uneasily" hour of five A.M.

"Yes, sir," John answers, promptly. He is not apt to forget Mr. Tom's orders.

But in five minutes after the carriage leaves the door, Sybil slips upstairs into Tom's room. There it is, on the clock upon the mantelpiece—a large white envelope, directed in Tom's free, bold hand to "Miss Helena Floyd." Sybil stands looking at it, and wishing she dared—she scarcely knows what.

Presently she puts out her hand to take it; but—perhaps her hand is not very steady—as she touches it, it slips back, and disappears behind the clock. It is out of sight entirely. John will never think of looking behind the clock, and no one will ever dream it was her fault. Her fault? Why, it—it was almost an accident! She hadn't meant to hide it!

A footstep on the stairs startles her, and she flies out of the room frightened, trembling, yet glad. And John does not find the letter, for she hears him, a little while after, remarking to Patty, the housemaid,—

"Mr. Tom says he left a letter on the mantelpiece, but there ain't none there. I s'pose he put it in his pocket, an' forgot it."

"Mr. Tom is mighty forgetful," responds Patty.

CHAPTER IV.

Tom has been gone a week. All day long Lena goes about the house trying to be herself. She tries in vain. The song has died out of her life.

She hopes, and watches, and desponds; starts at a footstep; is restless and feverish, and wretched; and spends nearly all of her nights in crying. No wonder Aunt Nannie thinks she is looking badly, and wants to give her quinine.

And George Ridgely adds to her trouble by renewing his love-making so earnestly, so pleadingly, that she is almost bewildered by it.

Sometimes she feels half-tempted to end it all by accepting him. Pride tempts her that way. If she accepts him, then no one will ever know—not even Tom himself—that her heart is broken by Tom's faithlessness. And, perhaps, after all, she may learn to love George.

She cannot live without love; and she knows George loves her. He has adored her, and no one else, ever since he was fifteen years old, and first came to the village school, she half makes up her mind to say yes. The crisis comes one evening when she is walking with George in the woods outside of the village. He turns suddenly, and says,—

"Look here, Lena! Do you think anyone will ever love you better than I do! Don't you know I'd give my life to make you happy! Can't you trust yourself with me! Oh, Lena, say yes, dear!" he urges, vehemently.

He is so good—so honest—and she is so wretched! Lena almost yields. Her hand lies in his. Alas! she does not hear the tramp of a horse on the soft carpet of green sward. At a little distance a horseman passes slowly along a path that crosses the one they are in. It is Tom Wyndham—the Fates will it so; and he sees Helena sitting with her hand in George Ridgely's hand—sees it, and rides away unseen by them.

If he had waited one moment he would have seen Helena suddenly snatch her hand away, cover her face, and sob out,—

"Oh, George, I can't! It wouldn't be right. I don't love you, my dear, good George; and I would only make you miserable."

And George is silent for a moment, with the bitterness of death in his heart. Then he soothes her gently; and he begs her not to cry, and not to mind him. He only wants her to be happy, he adds. You see, it is a little gleam of common sense that has saved Helena and honest George—saved them from a misery infinitely greater than any pain that wrings their hearts now.

But how did Tom come to be there just at the wrong time? He has come home tired, worried, out of spirits; and Sybil gives him some dinner, and chatters to him while he eats it.

"How is Miss Helena Floyd, Sybil? She wasn't well when I went away." He tries to say it carelessly.

"Lena! Oh, she's very well. Everybody says she's engaged to George Ridgely. They're out together all the time. I saw them go for a walk a few minutes ago."

Tom says not another word, but goes away, gets his horse, and rides off into the country. He is coming slowly back, after a long gallop, when he passes through the pleasant by-path, and sees the proof of Sybil's news. At least it looks like proof. But Tom thinks the matter over as he rides home. "Some fellows would just give up, and go off somewhere, and never see her again, and be as miserable as the devil—for life. That's the way it is in novels. But maybe there's something I don't understand. Perhaps she did write to me and her letter was lost. Maybe she's just doing a little bit of flirting with Ridgely. It isn't like her, and—well, for that matter, she may have been flirting with me. Appearances are against you, my little Lena; but I'm going to give myself one more chance for happiness, anyway."

But as he feels sure that Ridgely will be at Mr. Floyd's in the evening, he waits until morning—and hasn't a pleasant night of it either. Sometimes pride and wounded love and anger almost make him determine to ride away with the morning light, and never see her again.

But common sense gets the best of it; and soon after breakfast he stands in the shaded, flower-scented little parlour at Mr. Floyd's, and listens for Helena's entering footsteps.

He hears her coming at last; not with the quick, joyous tap-tap of her heeled slippers along

the hall that he is accustomed to. She comes slowly.

The door opens, and the slender, white-robed figure stands still almost in the doorway. Tom's heart beats rapidly. "It's all over, by George!" he thinks. Then he sees her face; pale, with dark shadows under her eyes; and she stands silently, and looks at him with great mournful eyes.

CHAPTER V.

"LENA! What on earth have you been doing to yourself! Oh, my love, tell me why you look so!" he cries.

He hurries up to her, shocked and alarmed, and takes her cold little hand.

"Tell me, Lena; you have been ill, and I did not know it!"

A world of love and tenderness thrills in his voice, and brings the colour to Lena's cheeks, so lately so pale.

Their eyes meet; and then—how it happens neither can tell; but in an instant she is sobbing in his arms, and he is whispering fond caressing words in her ear.

There is really not much to explain after that. It was all a mistake that a few words clear up. And Lena manages to tell her story without a word of blame for Sybil. She will not say anything to make Tom angry with her. Why should she! Will he love her any more because he loves his sister less!

"And now, little girl, I'm going to end all this nonsense. If people had known you and I belonged to each other, you wouldn't have been breaking your heart over idle gossip; and I wouldn't have had to go mooning round for a week, believing you had thrown me over for Ridgely. You see, if I hadn't have got that into my head I'd have written again."

"What are you going to do, Tom?" she asks, as he puts on his hat with a determined air.

"To beard the lion—a couple of lions—in their respective dens," he answers, as he walks away laughing.

"To marry my niece Helena! Why, bless my soul, Tom! If the child wants to marry you, there isn't anybody else I'd rather give her to. But I never thought of such a thing as Helena's marrying!" This from dear good absent-minded Uncle John. Not a very formidable "lion," certainly.

Tom wrings his hand gratefully, and then goes off to his father's study. The Judge is busy with some important papers, and does not even look up as Tom enters.

"Can I speak to you a moment, father!" Tom asks, huskily.

The Judge looks up now, nods, and pushes up his spectacles.

"I think it right to tell you, sir, that I am engaged to be married to Helena Floyd," the young man says, very quietly.

"Ah!"

The Judge looks at him keenly, but does not frown. There is a moment's silence, and Tom speaks again:

"I hope you do not disapprove of it, sir!"

The Judge shakes his head.

"No; but I imagined, from something Sybil said, that you were rather attracted by Miss Rivington. Her fortune would have been an attraction to most young men."

"Well, sir, not to me," Tom says, soberly. "I think I'd rather like my money to be my own and not my wife's. And, you see, the fact is—Helena and I love each other dearly."

This last sentence is uttered rather impetuously, and Tom colours a little.

The Judge nods again, and smiles quietly.

Then he pulls down his spectacles, and goes on with his papers; and Tom slips off for a long happy morning with Helena.

A vigorous search in Tom's room reveals the missing letter behind the clock. No one ever suspects that Sybil put it there. She is so glad not to be found out that she forgives Lena for spoiling her plans about Alice Rivington.

She even becomes very fond of her again—as all the Wyndham household are. As for the

Judge, he has been heard to say more than once, as he kisses Lena's soft cheek, or gently smooths her bright hair:

"My dear, you'll be the very wife for Tom! You have more common sense than any girl I know!"

[THE END]

WHAT LIES BEYOND?

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CHAPTER XXXV.—(continued.)

ANOTHER instant, the steel would have descended, when, as though that basilisk glance had penetrated even the closed lids, Mona moved restlessly, the great grey eyes unclosed, and met those bent upon her with such deadly hatred. Then the blow fell; but quick as her murderer, Mona's hand caught Kate's, and held it in a strengthful grip.

"Merciful Heaven! you would murder me!" she said.

Kate struggled wildly to free herself, but Mona was the stronger, and knew that it was her life for which she fought.

Fully sixty seconds the two girls struggled, then Mona got possession of the weapon, and flung it to the farther end of the room.

She could scarcely believe her own danger, or that the deed she had just averted were possible even in thought; but, if hate could kill, she would have fallen under the deadly glance Miss Mayhaw bent upon her.

"Why don't you scream!" said Kate. "In the next room is the man who yesterday was my father—who to-day is yours. Call him! He will come. Now, even the woman who all these years has been my mother will not plead for me."

"Hush!" entreated Mona; "they may hear you. Tell me—why did you want to kill me?"

"Because I hate you—because you have always come between me and the fulfilment of my nearest and dearest hopes! It is Fate. You have won, and I have lost. Now make your triumph complete, and send me to the prison where I once sent you."

"You sent me?"

"Yes. It was I who warned the soldiers. It was I who stole down stairs and saw the man enter the library, and heard you make an appointment for the following night. It was I who wrote Rob Foster's wife that note of warning on Alton Ayre's stolen paper. It was I who stole the blue light which was to have warned Bernard Ffrench's men. I have failed now—all will come right for you. But I am glad to let you know how I have thwarted you all this time—how I would still have thwarted and pursued you, but that Fate was stronger than I. And I did it all because I hated you, even as I hate you in this moment of my fall. Now call for help—I am ready."

"But I am not," answered Mona, gently. "I once thought that I owed you a very bitter debt, and I swore to repay it. I can do so now, when it has swelled a thousand times. Let this night rest for ever secret between ourselves. I swear never to reveal it! We never may be friends, but at least we need not be enemies. Go! I know what a prison is, Miss Mayhaw. You say you sent me there—I spare you such anguish."

"You mean that I may still keep my place here in this house?"

"Yes; keep it, and deserve it. Perhaps you will hate me less when you know I did not mean to wrong you."

"I should hate you more—you hear me, Mona Foster?—more! To me you are Mona Foster still, the bare-footed fisher-girl, who stole her way into my lover's heart. Every moment I lived would be filled with but one regret—that I did not strike earlier and with fatal aim."

With these words, she turned and glided from the room.

Mona, springing from the bed, locked and bolted the door, then fell on her knees in thanksgiving for her wonderful escape from death.

She still lay, with wakeful eyes, when she heard in the house a strange and sudden stir. An awful dread fell on her, which the truth but made more awful still.

Miss Mayhaw had been discovered dead in her own bed. In her clenched hand was a folded slip of paper, on which were written these words:

"I die because I will not owe my life to the magnanimity of the woman whom I hate."

Mona alone fully understood them; but she gave of them no explanation. It was her fullest payment of her debt.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE frightful tragedy was over, and peace again had settled over the little household, so strangely united. Claire was with Mona now. She had listened to the wonderful story with tears and smiles.

"It's like a novel," she observed. "Mona, I always said you were like a heroine, only you were such true flesh and blood."

Mona smiled a little sadly. She was wholly happy. Life was full of strange, new sweetness, and yet there was an ache somewhere. She dared not ask where it was, or try to find it out.

"I have something more to tell you, Claire. No matter how I discovered it; but Mr. Ayre always was faithful to Captain Ffrench. I want you to tell him, dear. It was Kate who wrote that note to the hut, and Kate who stole the light from its hiding-place in the rocks. She told me this herself, no matter when or how, only he ought to know it. He will not blame her too much now. Some day he and Mr. Ayre may meet, and I felt I had no right to keep back the truth."

"Poor Alton! How we have misjudged him! I wonder where he is? Mona, what would he say if he could see you now?"

"He would know, perhaps, that I was not quite unworthy. I should be glad of that, but I would still be to him the fisher-girl, the wretched inmate of a prison."

"Mona, you wrong him. As you once told me, so now I tell you."

But Mona remembered the long days of her waiting, and was silent. Even from Paul Millar she had heard nothing. How his great heart would rejoice in her new-found happiness!

Someone had called to see Claire. She was left alone, her thoughts busy with the past, when Miss Raymond re-entered, a strange light in her eyes as she bent over Mona, fondly kissing the girl.

"There is a messenger in the parlour from your friend, Paul Millar. He wants to see you. Will you go down?"

"Indeed, I will. How strange, Claire! I was just thinking of him, just wondering where he might be."

With a swift, light step she ran down the stairs. For a moment she thought the parlour empty; then a tall, straight figure rose from a seat at its farthest end and stood silent, with two outstretched hands. Burning blood rushed to her face, then receded, leaving it of deathly whiteness, as she slowly advanced to meet him. His hands dropped; a look of bitter disappointment swept across his face.

"It was not I whom you expected," he said.

"For me you have no welcome."

"No welcome, Mr. Ayre! Pardon me if I have so fully shown all that I feel; but I did not expect you. Claire told me it was someone from Paul."

"And so it is. He sent me to you. But for him I should have been across the seas ere now. He came to me in his noble manhood, believing that some strange mistake had separated us, and that I might make it all clear to you."

"I went to Sea View, expecting to find you there. Even Claire was gone; but, learning that she was here, I followed, hoping that she might give me news of you. What wonderful news she has recounted you may guess."

"It has left me stunned, wondering at my own identity. Oh, Mona, how different now must seem my every motive! I expected to find you still wrapped in the cloud of obscurity, where I could better prove my love, which has never wavered."

"I wrote you in the prison. You sent me no reply. I learned you were engaged to the young sailor. I went to the prison to see you. As its gates the story was confirmed. Forgive me that I believed then that you had never cared for me. If I wronged you, Heaven knows that I have suffered cruelly for that wrong. Do not think that I do not rejoice in your wonderful fortune. Only for the moment it made the task of winning you seem so hopeless that in my selfishness I would have carried you back to your cottage on the rocks."

He sank back in his chair, and buried his face in his hands. In her humility she had been very proud. Now all pride had fled, as softly she knelt down beside him, and laid her head upon his arm.

"Alton!" she whispered, "is it true? Did you write to me? Did you come to me in prison? Oh, I waited so long for that which never reached me! And you love me still! Tell me again."

"Mona!" he answered, "am I dreaming? Look up, my love. Look in my eyes straight and true. It is your voice that speaks—you have not learned to hate me! Oh, my darling, my beloved!"

He clasped her in his arms, raising her from her knees, close, close against his heart.

"Alton!" she said again, and sweeter than the sweetest music was the utterance of his name, falling from her lips.

Then she raised them of her own sweet will until they met his own. She had given him back his kiss.

The world could hold for him no moment of more exquisite soul-thrilling bliss. With her head pillowed on his breast, each listened in turn to all that had separated them so long, which now was made so clear.

From him who was to be her husband she withheld nothing, not even the secret of that memorable night. It was his due, and she knew that with him it was safe.

His face grew very dark as she told it, but at its end, Mona said, timidly:

"Perhaps I could not have forgiven, but that I knew it was her love for you that had driven her mad; and I who loved you so well, could feel only pity for her wretchedness."

The great joy of his presence overswept memory's bitter tide, and his long, fervent kiss upon her red, young lips, set the seal of forgetfulness upon the past.

"I will never leave you, mother," Mona whispered, as, in the twilight, she told her heart-story. "You will love Alton first, for my sake, then his own; but we are going to be as lovers always, if you wish it."

"No, my darling," her mother answered. "I shall be very glad to know that all is well with my beloved child, whom the Lord has given me back for a little while before He calls me. You need not leave me, dearest. You will make your home with us always—you and your husband. You will not begrudge me the joy of seeing you every hour that is left me, neither will my new-found son."

"Oh, mother, how unselfish you are! You are sure that you wish it so?"

"Very sure, my darling, though I cannot believe it true. But yesterday you were a baby—to-day you would be a wife! But bring Alton to me. These matters are not for you, only for him and me. Do you fear to put your future in our hands?"

"Fear? Ah, my precious mother, the day your arms sheltered me, fear of all things save that ever they might unlock their embrace, and that I might waken to the old life to find the new a dream, left me for ever. Mother, darling mother, make me worthy a love and life like yours!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

It was Mona's wedding-day. All that she had dreamed of earthly happiness had reached the consummation in the hour when she uttered the solemn vows which made her Alton Ayre's wife. Men had held their breath as she entered the church, leaning on her father's arm. The strange

story of her restoration to the parents who so long had mourned her dead had spread abroad, and when her exquisite beauty shone forth peerless to all their sight, it seemed a fit ending to some fairy tale.

About the slight young figure clung the white satin robe, sweeping the ground far behind her. Diamonds glistened on her throat (the necklace taken from the poor crazy woman's fingers to be replaced by one of glass, and in which the poor creature noted no change) and in her ears. A veil of tulle enveloped her.

Her husband stood waiting at the altar to receive her. Clear and distinct rang out her voice. A few moments and all was over. She was his! It was his hand that threw back her veil and bent to press the first kiss upon her lips. Her father's followed. Then she took her husband's arm, a matchless smile breaking over her lovely face, irradiating it with its own beauty.

But one cloud rested on her wedding-morn. Her mother could not be present at the ceremony, but awaited them at home. They were to make no wedding trip. Mona's home-happiness was too new a thing to wrench herself from it, and Alton too gladly gave consent to any wish of hers. A few friends and the wedding party were to enjoy the wedding breakfast, then the little home-circle would be unbroken.

Mona had had but one bridesmaid. She knew but one friend. Claire had stood with her in this hour of her supreme happiness, as the same Claire had stood with her in the hour of her extreme misery.

"How perfect she is!" Claire whispered to Bernard French, as he approached her.

Once more he and Alton Ayre had clasped hands, each feeling that the other's grasp was stainless, and that each heart was to the other bared, yet with no soil upon its honour.

"Yes," he answered; but in his gaze, as it rested on Mona, was no trace of the old passion which once had awayed him.

He saw in her only his friend's wife. His feeling for her now did his friend no wrong. From her his eyes wandered to the sweet face beside him—the girl whose generous loyalty never had wavered—and his heart gave one quick bound, as he realised how necessary she had become to him—how dreary a thing his life must be should he accept as final the answer she once had given him.

"Claire!" he said, in a moved voice, "will you come into the conservatory with me? I want to speak with you."

The colour flushed her face, as she complied with his request.

A moment they stood silent amid the bloom and fragrance of the flowers: then he spoke:

"Once," he said, "I asked you to be my wife, and you refused my prayer. I think you were right, then. I see now that I was wrong. But, darling, as I was honest then, so am I honest now. Then I could not offer you all my heart. Now it beats but for you. The old love is dead. The new love has kindled into warmer fire upon its ashes. I dare not look into my future without your sweet presence there to make its brightness. Claire, I am not worthy of you; but Heaven is my judge that I will strive to be. My own, look up! Give me some little sign, that I may hope."

"It is not pity, Bernard! You are quite sure of yourself?"

"Pity! For what, my love! If I have gained your heart, I envy no king his crown. Is it so, Claire?"

"Do you not know!" she said. "Oh, Bernard, have I not loved you always? Once, Bernard—once when you were very ill and unconscious—I stooped and kissed you. 'He will never know,' I said. 'It can do him no harm.'"

"Harm! It was that kiss brought me back to life. I know it! And have I owed it all this time? Lift up your face, my own. Let me cancel my debt without delay."

It was a new joy when Claire's betrothal was announced. She and Bernard were the last to leave Mona in her perfect happiness.

"Come, we must go to mother," she then said.

And, with her husband's arm about the slender

waist, she opened the door of her mother's room. On its threshold she paused, amazed, for on the wall opposite hung the portrait Bernard French had painted of herself.

"It is his wedding-gift to us, my darling," whispered Alton. "Ah, my own, you have learned now 'What lies beyond!' The picture's mission is ended. Henceforth my wife may have no future her husband shall not share."

And so the dawn, which symbolised her name, broke bright and beautiful at last, to find no night, pray Heaven, save in the evening shadows of eternity.

[THE END.]

We have recently had the opportunity of testing "Matchless" Metal Polish, a paste for cleaning all kinds of metals, and free from dangerous fatty acids which produce verdigris. It is very convenient and easy to use, and, in our opinion, produces a much more lasting brilliancy, and with less labour, than is to be obtained by the use of other polishes that we know of. As "Matchless" Metal Polish can be had in penny tins, it is within the reach of all housewives, who should give it a trial.

In France the peasant still sticks to medicines calculated to turn the average doctor's hair grey with horror. Wine is an ingredient of every prescription. In fever cases it is always the predominant one. The French peasant's faith in fermented grape-juice is truly beautiful. If his children are stricken with the measles, he gives them beakers of wine, well sweetened with honey and highly spiced with pepper. For a severe cold he administers a quart of red wine and a melted tallow candle mixed. For scarlet or brain fever he gives eggs, white wine and-soot well beaten together. Not all their superstitions are curious; some are pathetic. A mother, for instance, often buries her dead child with its favourite toy or a lock of her own hair in the coffin, "that it may not feel quite alone."

SEVERAL of the through trains running out of New York are soon to be equipped with luxurious vaudeville cars fitted up with all the accessories of a regular theatre. This startling innovation, which marks a new era in the comforts of railroad travel, will first be tried on the Lehigh Valley system and the Nickel Plate Railroad. The first theatrical car will be run on the Black Diamond Express on April 1st 1899. One of these cars is now being built for John F. Harley, a well-known theatrical manager, who will provide the entertainments. The various shows given will consist of vaudeville performances and concerts, the stage being too small for all but the simpler theatrical productions. The interior of the car will resemble as far as possible that of a regular theatre. The seats will be set upon an incline, in order that those in the rear will get a good view of the stage. The car is designed to seat sixty people. Each car will be supplied with a permanent orchestra, consisting of a piano, violin, cornet, and flute, which will occupy the customary place in front of the stage. Performances will be given in the theatre-car continuously from an early hour in the morning till late at night. At stated hours the ushers will pass through the train, which will, of course, be vestibuled, announcing the performance and distributing programmes. The tickets for these performances will be on sale at the ticket offices along the line the same as sleeping-car berths or apartments, and can be arranged for in advance for any date or performance. The theatre cars are to be used for a variety of purposes. Arrangements are being made to use this little theatre for church purposes on Sundays, when the stage will be converted into a pulpit, and the piano used to lead the congregation in song. Not the least attraction of the theatre car is the fact that the seats are removable, and a dancing floor is to be carried as part of its equipment. With the aid of the orchestra the car may be converted into a veritable ball-room, where, amid flowers and palms, the travellers may dance away the weary hours of long journeys.

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THE bridal wreath is usually formed in Germany of myrtle branches, in France and England of orange blossoms, in Italy and French Switzerland of white roses, in Spain of red roses and pinks, in the islands of Greece of vine leaves, in Bohemia of rosemary, and in German Switzerland of a crown of artificial flowers.

FACETIÆ.

WHY is the stage like the eagle? Because it has wings and flies, of course.

FIRST MATRON: "How your husband must suffer with the influenza, coughing and sneezing as he does." Second Matron: "Yes, indeed; but it does so amuse the baby."

MR. NUWED (at the tie-counter): "Here's half-a-crown for you, my friend, if you'll hide those nightmare ties. My wife will be in here in a minute to buy me a Christmas gift."

MAUD: "My mamma says she can remember when your mamma kept a grocery store." Marle: "My mamma says she can remember how much your mamma owes her for groceries."

TRIVVET: "What makes you call Miss Tenspot a new woman? I haven't noticed anything forward about her." Dloer: "She keeps her engagements to the minute."

"Weren't you out in all that rain?" asked the Clifton girl. "No," said the young woman from Boston, "I was merely in the portion of the rain that descended in my immediate vicinity."

PROUD OF HIS RECORD: "That's all right, young man," said Old Soaks to the young recruiting parson, "but after all your talking I'll bet that you haven't signed the pledge as many times as I have."

TOBACCONIST CUSTOMER: "The figure of the Indian is all right, but I don't understand why you put that bottle of rum in his hand." Sign Sculptor: "Reckon you've never seen a live Injin, boss."

PORT (to friend): "I wish you would read my drama before I send it to the theatrical manager for his perusal." Friend: "I am very busy just now, but don't keep it back for me. When he has returned it will be quite time enough."

"What do you do for cold feet, doctor?" The doctor, in thoughtful surprise: "Why, I'd go out into the snow barefoot, or sleep with my feet out of the window, I suppose. Why do you ask? What do you want cold feet for?"

"WELL?" said the assistant in a chemist's shop to an Irishman. "I want a lump of that," said Pat, pointing to a pile of soap. "Thank you. Will you have it scented or unscented?" "I'll take it wld me," was the prompt reply.

PERDITA: "With as many admirers as you have it must have been a rather expensive Christmas for you." Panelope: "Oh, no, not at all. I merely gave them each more or less encouragement."

HE: "Carrie, you don't seem to care so much for me as you did when we were first married." SHE: "As for that matter, I don't think so much of my hat as I did when I got it last Easter."

REPORTER: "It is said that yourself and your comrade, O'Hoggarty, were calm and collected after the dynamite explosion." O'Fisherty: "Well, it wor loike this—O! wor calm and O'Hoggarty wor collected."

SQUIRE (who has invited tenant to lunch): "Will you have a little fowl, Mr. Stubbins?" STUBBINS: "I am not over hungry, sar, but if the fowl be a very small 'un, I dare say I can manage 'un."

"When I hear a man sayin' he 'wouldn't steal a pin," said Uncle Joe, "I sometimes takes it as an evidence of great honesty. An' den, agin, it simply calls 'tention to de fact dat de market price for pins ain' very big, nohow."

MRS. SUDENRICH: "What nice spoons them are!" Dealer: "Yes, madam; they are our very latest designs." Mrs. S.: "Are they to eat fruit with?" Dealer: "They are souvenir spoons, madam." Mrs. S.: "Gimme a dozen. Our new French cook makes elegant souvenirs."

SHOE DEALER: "Shoes should not be worn right along, ma'am. They should be given a chance to get back their shape. Buy two pairs, ma'am, and wear one pair one day and the other the next." Fair Customer: "Will shoes last longer that way?" Dealer (with confidence): "Yes, indeed, ma'am; twice as long."

"MART, I saw the baker kiss you to-day. I think I shall go down and take the bread in future." "T'wouldn't be no use, ma'am; he wouldn't kiss you, 'cos he promised he'd never kiss anybody else but me."

ALBERT (time 11.30 p.m.): "Really, I must be going now; it's getting late." Laura (yawning): "Well, you know the old saying!" Albert: "What's that?" Laura: "Better late than never."

"WHAT is this £5 that you have set aside for incidentals in your Christmas expenses list, John?" "That! Oh, that, my dear, is for the doctor's bill after the children have enjoyed Christmas to the full."

EDITOR: "You wish to join our staff as proof-reader?" Applicant: "Yes, sir." "Do you understand the requirements of that responsible position?" "Perfectly, sir. Whenever you make any mistakes in the paper just blame them on me, and I'll never say a word."

"SPEAKING of mushrooms and toadstools, gentlemen," chimed in Dumley, "a friend of mine not long ago gathered a quantity of what he supposed were mushrooms, and took 'em home. His wife cooked 'em, and the whole family ate heartily of 'em." "And did they all die?" inquired the crowd, very much shocked. "No, they happened to be mushrooms, you see," replied Dumley, with a faraway look in his eyes; "but it was a narrow escape."

SQUIRE: "Your dog has just killed one of my sheep." Farmer: "He ain't my dawg." Squire: "Why, confound you, I saw him last night with you at the station!" Farmer: "Yus, we was mates then; but the last time he worried a sheep I says to him, 'Bob,' sez I, 'if yer let hunger git the better part of yer morals agin, you an' me part company'—so yer see he's on his own hook now."

An Edinburgh lawyer had a very nasty temper. One night his small boy was sitting by him studying arithmetic. The father broke out: "What on earth ails you? Why can't you sit still—wriggling and writhing every minute?" "It's all your fault," blubbered the boy. "Why is it?" "Cos I asked you last night how much a billion was, and you said it was 'a deuce of a lot!'" The teacher asked me the same question to-day and I said the same thing. And that's why I can't keep still."

SOME time ago a gentleman received from a sea captain a fine specimen of the bird which sailors call the "laughing-jackass," and he was not a little proud of it. As he was carrying it home, he met a brawny Irish navvy, who stopped and asked him: "Phwat kind of a burrd is that, sorr?" "That's a laughing jackass," explained the gentleman. The Irishman, thinking he was being made fun of, was equal to the occasion, and responded, with a twinkle of the eye: "It's not yerself, it's the burrd Oi mane, sorr."

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SOCIETY.

PRINCESS HENRY OF PRUSSIA is expected to arrive at Genoa from China early in April, and she will join the Queen at Claret for a few days before returning to Germany.

THE Princess Henry of Prussia will shortly be received by the Dowager Empress and the Emperor of China, and negotiations are in progress for the special ceremonies to be observed on the occasion, it being the first time that a female member of a ruling European family has visited China.

Few of Prince Ruij's admirers in Europe would recognize the famous cricketer in native costume, though English cricket enthusiasts may fancy they know his face well; yet they would be extremely surprised to see him in his uniform of Colonel of the Bodyguard of the Maharajah of Patiala. This uniform is extremely gorgeous, of pink silk, richly embroidered.

THE Dowager Empress of Russia is residing at the Antioch Palace, in St. Petersburg, with the Grand Duchesses Olga and the Grand Duke Michael. The Empress Dagmar will spend about a month at St. Petersburg, after which she is going to Copenhagen, on a visit to the King of Denmark and to meet the Princess of Wales.

THE DUKE and DUCHESS OF YORK have been living quietly at York Cottage. Their Royal Highnesses have promised to open at the end of next month the new wing added to the Royal Portsmouth and Gosport Hospital in commemoration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The Duke of York has consented to preside at the festival dinner in connection with the Royal Alfred Aged Seamen's Institution, which is to take place on May 19th.

THE German Emperor wears a queer old ring, set with a stone of little value. It is a Hohenzollern talisman, and no Hohenzollern to the present day has dared to question its powers. The legend is that a toad brought it into the room of the wife of Elector John of Brandenburg, and deposited it on her bed, after which the toad hopped away and never was seen again. The father of Frederick the Great had it mounted in a ring, and it has been preserved religiously ever since.

THE Queen does not always wear her glasses. She seldom reads to herself now, her Maids of Honour being specially selected for their voices and capabilities in reading. Before an appointment of this kind is made a kind of reading test is always gone through. Private letters from near relatives are the only reading matter undertaken by her Majesty. Those paragraphs in the newspapers which are selected by a secretary for her Majesty's perusal, and pasted on to a special sheet each day, are invariably read out to the Queen by a Lady-in-Waiting.

THE Queen's new yacht is to be launched at Pembroke in March, but she will not be ready for service before the summer of 1900. It is said that the Duke of York is to launch the vessel, and that he will be the guest of Lord Cawdor at Stackpole Court during his visit to South Wales. The yacht is to be a thoroughly comfortable cruising vessel, being essentially a pleasure-boat, and her displacement is to be nearly five thousand tons. The yacht will have unusually long and deep bilge keels, in order to minimize rolling, and her full speed is to be twenty knots per hour.

THE Duke of York, as Master of the Trinity House, in which capacity he succeeded the Duke of Coburg six years ago, has accepted the Lord Mayor's invitation to the annual luncheon to the Elder Brethren, and Monday, June 5th, is the day fixed. The Prince of Wales, the Duke of Coburg, and the Duke of Cambridge—all Elder Brethren—have signified their intention to be present, and it is expected the Duke of Connaught, who has recently joined the fraternity, will also be able to attend. The Duke of Argyll, Lord Salisbury, Lord Northbrook, Lord Rosebery, Mr. Goschen, and Lord George Hamilton are also among the Honorary Elder Brethren.

STATISTICS.

THERE are 750,000 cats in London.

In the nine years 1881-9, only five persons were executed in London.

It is estimated that two-thirds of the male population of the world use tobacco.

A FIRST-RATE collection of insects contains about 25,000 distinct species.

Of 1,000 men who marry it is found that 332 marry younger women, 570 marry women of the same age, and 89 older women.

GEMS.

NEGLIGENCE is the rust of the soul, that corrodes through all her best resolves.

WHEN we advance a little into life we find that the tongue of man creates nearly all the mischief in the world.

GOOD nature is the very air of a good mind, the sign of a large and generous soul, and the peculiar soil in which virtue prospers.

FROM a worldly point of view politeness is the best stock-in-trade that one can possess. It has opened more doors of advancement than any faculty, genius, or art, because for strangers there is no other way to judge another's character than by externals. Even the spurious politeness which is assumed for certain purposes or to accomplish certain ends, has a degree of success, because it overcomes prejudice and wins good opinions.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BROWN SWEETBREADS.—Cut them in pieces like a small egg, flour them, and fry them, put them in a stewpan with some good beef gravy, salt, and cayenne; stew till tender, thicken with butter and flour, and add some mushroom ketchup.

TOMATO SOUP.—One quart of tomatoes, one quart of water, half-cup of rolled cracker crumbs, one tablespoonful of butter. Season with pepper and salt to taste. When well boiled, say three-quarters of an hour, add one quart of hot milk, and just before taking off the fire put half-tablespoonful of soda in the soup tureen and pour boiling soup over it and stir well. Sometimes meat and barley are added with less tomatoes. A small potato and chopped onion can also be added for a change.

OKRA SOUP.—Chop and fry until brown one pound of round steak, with two generous tablespoonfuls of butter and one onion. Into a soup kettle now put one pint of okra cut in very thin slices, and add two quarts of boiling salted water. When tender add the steak and onions and boil slowly two hours. Rub together one tablespoonful of butter and two tablespoonfuls of flour, and add one quart of hot milk. Pour this into the soup kettle and season with white pepper. Let it come to boiling point, and serve at once.

ALMA PUDDING.—Two eggs and their weight in flour, castor sugar, butter, or good dripping; one teaspoonful of baking powder, two ounces of chopped candied peel, one tablespoonful of milk. Thoroughly grease a mould or basin. Put the butter and sugar into another basin, and beat with a wooden spoon till the two ingredients are like whipped cream. Now break the eggs into a cup to see that they are good, and add them to the creamed butter and sugar. Beat them well in. Mix the flour with the baking powder, then add them to the butter, &c.; stir it very lightly. Then add the peel and the milk. Pour the mixture into your prepared mould, and steam for two hours. Turn it out, and serve it with sweet sauce poured round.

MISCELLANEOUS.

NEARLY all the cotton raised in Egypt is sent to England. Factories do not flourish there on account of the dust and the excessively dry air.

In the Queen's stables at Buckingham Palace there are about a hundred horses, including the famous creams, which are only used on special occasions.

It is said that a new kind of cloth is being made in Lyons from the down of hens, ducks and geese. Seven hundred and fifty grates of feathers make more than a square yard of light waterproof cloth.

THE British Museum contains the complete manuscripts of Pope's translations of the "Iliad" and "Odyssey." Much of the copy is written on the backs of letters, and among them are epistles from Steele, Addison, Rowe, Young and other celebrities.

A WATCH in the form of a shirt-stud has been made by an English artisan. Its dial is three-sixteenths of an inch in diameter, and it is to be worn with two other studs. By turning the upper stud you wind the watch, while by turning the lower one the hands are adjusted.

ONE of the many useful things which absolute privation has been the means of making known to the world is Irish moss. The poor inhabitants of the Irish coast were driven to its use by the pangs of hunger. When boiled, it produces a thick, nourishing, and not unpalatable jelly. It is most beneficial for diseases of the throat and lungs.

THE first attempt at scientific forecasting of the weather was the result of a storm which, during the Crimean War, November 14th, 1854, almost destroyed the fleets of France and England. As a storm had raged several days earlier in France, investigations were made, which showed that the two were in reality one storm, and that its path could have been ascertained and the fleet forewarned in ample time to reach safety.

BEIRA, the mushroom city of Portuguese East Africa, may be called a city of zinc. All the houses, all the hotels and public buildings, barracks and warehouses are built of zinc. So great has been the speculation in building and so urgent the need for supplying the inhabitants with cheap and speedily erected dwellings that a city has been built up in six months. Thousands of tons of zinc from France, England and America supplied the material.

THE use of the rosary seems especially suited to an eastern clime and to the repose of an Oriental mind. The Buddhists are fond of using very smooth beads of glass, polished jade, or coral. The favourite Japanese rosaries are made of polished wood, crystal, onyx and chased silver. A rosary of very great size was recently brought from a temple in Kioto, Japan. The largest bead is about six inches in diameter, and the rosary entire is about twenty-four feet long. The huge beads are of dark brown polished wood. They are hollow, and have each a figure of a god inside the little shrine, which can be seen through a lattice of brass work.

At both North and South Shields, on the Tyne-side, there are large hills towering far above the houses, looking down upon church spires, docks, and the shipping, covering many scores of acres, which are certainly not the handiwork of Nature. One of them, much greater in bulk than the combined Pyramids of Egypt, is nearly exactly square, and evidently of human origin. These hills are made of flints, a kind of stone which does not occur except in South-Eastern England, and they have been carried piecemeal in ships from the Thames Valley. They are called the ballast heaps, and are the actual ballast of the colliers which, having carried coal by sea to London, could not safely return with empty holds for fear of being capized. So these enormous hills of ballast represent ton for ton some of the mountainous masses of coal which have been consumed by the omnivorous maw of the capital and turned into fog to darken the London streets.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

BEA.—Her maiden name.

A NEW READER.—The lodger's property cannot be detained.

ALMA.—Her Majesty the Queen is five feet two inches in height.

E. S.—You must carry out the conditions of your engagement.

PATRIOT.—Omdarman is, we believe, accented on the second syllable.

IS A FIX.—Only a lawyer can help you with particulars how to proceed.

TAMMAR.—No chance, unless you have some proof beside your own word.

TANZED.—The whole of Palestine belongs to Turkey, but France holds Syria.

KATRINA.—You had better show them to some expert in your neighbourhood.

CREDITOR.—They had better try to come to terms for payment by instalments.

PAT.—Inquire at Emigrants' Information Office, Broadway, Westminster.

NEMISA.—A lady should be the first to acknowledge a gentleman acquaintance.

MIM W.—If the agreement was for a definite number of lessons she must give them.

GRATEFUL READER.—Add a little turpentine to the water used for scrubbing the floor.

LALLI.—A palindrome is a sentence which reads backwards and forwards the same.

ONE LITTLE MAID.—If the floor is very dirty mix a little chloride of lime with the sand.

CATCHER.—"Greater London" is the area consigned to the charge of the Metropolitan Police.

IS TROUBLE.—We could not think of advising such a case, it is one for strict medical treatment.

LANA.—There is nothing better for swollen glands than gently rubbing them up with hot oil.

JOHN.—We can give you no information relative to the value of the paintings of the artist named.

V. H.—An anagram is the transposition of the letters of a name by which new words are formed.

WRAK WOMAN.—If, as it appears, the child is illegitimate, the father has no claim to its custody.

IGNORANT OF LAW.—The marriage would be legal and binding if duly performed in a church or by a registrar.

ANXIOUS.—Not having ourselves entered for the competition, we are not in a position to give you any information.

BAD SPELLER.—Webster's dictionary is as good as any, but a bookseller would show you smaller and cheaper ones.

SORRELY TAMED.—If the wife has given her husband grounds for a divorce he is no longer liable for her maintenance.

ATTENTION.—From your letter we do not think you would make a success as an author. Better try some other line of work.

A TWENTY YEARS' READER.—The name you mention cannot be rendered into Latin. It would be just the same as in English.

EMILY B.—Daily steam the part over boiling water; press out all black points by means of a watch-key; wash with hot water.

NATTA.—Wash it clean first, and let it get perfectly dry before you use the glass-paper; then dust it well, and apply French polish.

ISALINE.—Eat a tiny piece of lemon-peel—the yellow part only—just before taking the medicine, and it will not taste nearly so nasty.

CECIL.—Take a piece of material like the blind, dip it into boiling starch, lay the piece over the hole with a cloth over, and press till dry.

LADY GERALDINE.—With a piece of rag dab on a little spirit of turpentine. This will soon soften it, when you can easily clear it away.

PIP.—Go to the registrar of births, deaths, and marriages of the district in which you reside, and he will instruct you how to proceed.

BON.—Pour a strong solution of salt-and-water down the pipes once a week. It is an excellent cleanser and removes all unpleasant odour.

INQUIRER.—Jews-harp is said to be a corruption of jaw-harp, the name suggested from its being placed between the jaws when played.

FLORA.—The Punjab is a large district of India, and several companies of the Royal Artillery are always stationed at various places in it.

MAGDA.—Get a small bottle of spirits of wine, take a piece of new flannel, dip it in the spirit, and rub the shoes lengthways, turning the flannel as it gets soiled.

CHUCK.—For burns the white of an egg is a valuable remedy, by simply using the white as varnish to exclude the air, or it may be beaten up with a teaspoonful of fresh lard till a little water separates.

CURIOUSITY.—Lord Kitchener of Khartoum was born in 1850, and commenced his active career in the Army in 1871, when he entered the Royal Engineers. He is unmarried.

MAIDENHAIR.—Write to Mr. Lees Bay, Specialist, South Castle-street, Liverpool. Mention our paper, and if you enclose a stamp he will send you full particulars of what you require.

RHODA.—A thorough knowledge of shorthand, and a good general education, would enable you, after some practice and experience of the world, to become a reporter.

BANK CHIEF.—The Falkland Islands are a group of two hundred islands in the South Atlantic Ocean, belonging to Great Britain. They cover an area of about 6,500 square miles.

ENGLISH GIRL.—The two queens ruling in their own right are Queen Victoria of England and Queen Wilhelmina of Holland. Maria Christina of Spain is simply Queen Regent.

A FLIRT.—When an engagement is broken, both parties should return the letters that have passed between them, and also the presents that have been given, if they were of a durable character.

NEW TENANT.—The stain must be applied the same way as the grain of the wood. When polishing afterwards the same plan should be followed, and care be taken to rub the way of the grain.

I LOVE YOU.

Your eyes are bright, my darling,
Like the sun that shines on high,
Your voice like the low murmur
Of the soft wind passing by.

Your smiles are like the sunbeams
Dancing on the waves of sea,
Your lips are made for kisses—
Yes, the sweetest that can be.

Your hair is long and golden,
It falls over your shoulders white,
To hide the laughing dimples
From the kissing rays of light;

Your mouth is so bewitching,
Showing teeth of whitest pearl—
In all a maiden's virtues
You're a sweet and lovely girl.

The flowers that bloom so fragrant
All about your earthly way,
Are the sweetest flowers now growing
In love's garden-bowers to-day;

The birds that sing above you,
In the dear old maple-tree,
Show the teeth of whitest pearl—
Of the love consuming me.

I long to tell you, darling,
Of a sweet thought in my breast;
I'd speak it in a whisper
Ere the sun sinks in the west;

But when I see your blushes
I can never say a word,
Though my fond heart's deep centre
By the strongest love is stirred.

I'll tell it you, my darling,
With those sweet and virgin charms,
My long-kept precious secret,
While I hold you in my arms;

Bend your sun-kissed tresses lower,
Till the dimples come to view,
While my lips receive your kisses,
Hear me whisper: "I love you."

MONA.—Try a paste made of whitening, powdered soda, and water to remove those unsightly stains. You might mix a little liquid ammonia with it if they are very bad.

DAMP HANDS.—Well mix together three parts calomel to acid, seven parts talc, and ninety parts powdered starch. Fuller's earth is excellent for them too, and a little powdered alum may be dissolved in the water in which the hands are washed occasionally.

MINAR.—Upon every accession to the throne, a new Great Seal is struck, and the old one cut into four pieces and deposited in the Tower of London. Formerly the seal was broken by the king's command, and the fragments were given to the poor of religious houses.

BLUSH ROSE.—There is no cure for blushing or a sudden flushing of the face when the latter arises from an unknown cause. As a rule, blushing is the result of constitutional nervousness. The only thing to do is not to think people are looking at you.

OLY DUCKLING.—It is by no means altogether a rare fortune to be lacking in great personal beauty. You may not attract the same amount of attention as your prettier friend does, but when you gain an admirer you know that it is one who appreciates worth and beauty of character rather than outside show, which proves that he is a man worth caring for, and one to whom you can confide your life's happiness with perfect trust.

BERRY.—Spread the gloves on the towel as smoothly as possible. Dip the flannel in the milk and rub a little soap on it. With this rub the gloves, working downwards from wrist to finger, holding the glove firmly meanwhile with your left hand. Continue rubbing till all dirt is quite removed. You will need to rinse the flannel often. Lay them without rinsing on a clean dry towel, pulling them as nearly the right shape as possible, and when dry they should be soft and glossy.

MOTHER OF FIVE.—The following is a nice light currant pudding without yeast: Cut up half a pound of stale bread, pour over it a pint of boiling milk; let it soak half-an-hour. If all the milk is not absorbed, pour it off. Beat up two eggs lightly, stir into the bread, which you should mash with a spoon, add three ounces of cleaned currants, one ounce of sugar and a grate of nutmeg. Turn into a greased basin, tie a cloth over top, and boil two hours.

BROKEN-HEARTED LOTTERIE.—Our advice to you is to put your pride in your pocket and go to the young man with a straightforward acknowledgment of your own blameworthiness in the matter, and we doubt not that you will find him equally ready to take his own share of the blame upon his shoulders. Lovers' quarrels should always be settled privately by the parties themselves, without outside interference of any kind, and we think you would be very unwise to employ anyone as a go-between.

IN A PAINFUL POSITION.—The position is certainly a very unpleasant one for you, but we think you are taking a decidedly exaggerated view of it when you speak of it being "your duty" to break off the engagement. The young man is of an age to chafe for himself, and there seems to be no reason, except, perhaps, that of jealousy for the sister to dislike you. We can only advise you to go on as you have begun, and trust that when she knows you better she will like you more, and conquer her unreasonable "distrust." Many girls are engaged at nineteen.

A. P. B.—Take two ounces of the best white starch, and pour over it, without stirring, half a pint of cold water. Allow this to stand while you dissolve as much borax as will lie heaped up on a shilling in a teaspoonful of boiling water. When the borax mixture is cold, add it to the starch. Pour into the starch one tablespoonful of turpentine, and mix the whole carefully with the hand. On no account must any undissolved borax be put into the starch, or it will make shiny patches on the linen. This quantity is enough for four pairs of cuffs and seven collars. A little borax water should be kept in readiness for adding to the starch should it become too thick.

VEGETARIAN.—Savoury pie, on which so many vegetarian dishes are based, is made of one layer of tapioca, which has been soaked in warm water until it is quite soft and all the lumps taken out, and seasoned with pepper, salt, and chopped herbs, according to the vegetable from which the pie gets its name. On the top of the tapioca lay a layer of green peas, tomatoes, or cauliflower, whatever is to be used. These should be par-boiled or raw, according to what they are. On the top of this comes a layer of hard-boiled potatoes, or curried rice. Sometimes grated carrots are used, chestnut flour, or mushroom powder. These layers are repeated until the dish is full, then it is covered with ordinary piecrust, and baked in a quick oven.

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